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Speak A New Lingo

The military jargon popular after World War II is passé. It's time to connect with the under-30 generation.

STRATEGY, GOAL, OBJECTIVE AND ATTACK ARE military terms that converge to killing people at war-time. Western corporations, overwhelmed by World War II and its aftermath, borrowed and translated these terms into business. The West spent the 1950s in post-war reconciliation; the 60s demanded infrastructure build-up, while the 70s saw consumerism waft in; and the 1980s had people returning to their roots, re-discovering the organic after OPEC's oil crisis. All the while, multinational companies dominated the world with their inventions and innovations that came every 20 years. The big departure into digital technology came in the 1990s, while the predominant mood of the 21st century is globalisation. The difference, now, is that innovations appear every 20 days, market rules have changed and people command industry with increased demand and aspiration.

Have corporations kept up in these disruptive times? Hardly. Corporate culture is still driven by war terms, whereas what's crucial to running business today are cross cultural blending, soft skills for relationships, social connect, proactive customer sensitivity, outside-in corporate culture, employee promise to clients for the future and delivering extra benefits in tangible terms to customers.

Mismatch between war-influenced business terms and today's digital world: World War II ravaged most of Europe's beautiful terrain. North America has not witnessed the war this way, but it has had plenty of loss that's visible only in graveyards of its dead soldiers. What multinational corporations co-opted into business was the power of strategy, target, ammunition capacity, timing and the numbers and dedication of soldiers



Multinational corporations co-opted into business the power of strategy, target, ammunition capacity, and the dedication of soldiers. But these war-terms are now outdated.

in winning the war. But war is different from business. It is a short-term mission and, thankfully, not sustainable. The word 'mission' had a different significance when used by Christian missionaries to convert people—in religion, a mission is a belief—but used in war, it becomes a 'Do or Die' affair. That's why a corporate mission usually serves no purpose.

Since they are of ambiguous origin, the interpretation of words like 'belief' and 'mission' is quite subjective in corporations. Unable to clarify the difference, corporations use military terms to

instil discipline for achieving organisational results. Such an approach worked till the 80s. From the 90s, digital technology started revolutionising the world, taking it to a 21st century of diversity and the Zap generation. These under-30 youngsters have discarded military discipline. What jars them is that money is being spent on war. They detest reading that the US 2010 defence budget is about \$1 trillion. Fighting against the Axis powers in WW II was a real cause, but when US military spending today exceeds the combined total of every other country in the world, Zappers feel war has become only a power-hankering game. Business terms require a radical change to match the Zapper mentality.

Who are these Digital Zappers? Our global interactions with different people for different brands have shown us that living in this disruptive century are three distinct generations:

- Tech-born Digital Zap (born after 1980)
- Compromise (born between 1965 and 1980)
- Retro (born before 1965)

Engulfed in this century's rapid social change, Digital Zappers have no sustained attachments, but their thought process

The present digital generation is clued-in to the latest technology. It has a multitude of ideas and thinks on-the-go.



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incorporates the multitudes of every sphere today. Corporate discipline and future direction should be driven by Zapper diversity instead of military-like indoctrination totally disconnected from the external world.

The disruptive 21st century: The change from the 19th century's mechanical era to the 20th century's electronic age was big, but evolutionary. Between the mechanical gramophone and electronic turntable, there's no radical difference in looks, mechanism and functioning. Along came the iPod in the 21st century—surpassing every known system for operating a music player. The change the iPod and MP3 players have brought is revolutionary. Entertainment giant Sony has just announced it is discontinuing production of the Walkman that pioneered mobile music. This proves that even an inventor can be left behind if he fails to foresee cross-industry digital trends. It's amazing that a computer-engineering firm entered the entertainment business and defeated its ruling giant.

Connecting to Digital Zap: I went to Paris in 1973 to fulfill my childhood dream of becoming an artist. I found huge differences then with other 19-year-olds of French, Italian, English, German, Swiss, Belgian and American origin. Coming from a poor refugee colony in West Bengal, I was bound to not connect. But I later discovered that even people of the same generation in Europe and the US did not connect socially at that time. According to Churchill, it was not easy for European and American youth to connect with one another and the World War II cause, even as they called themselves the Allies.

Today, I feel, every country's youth has more or less the same social connect. There is a coherent trend, a globalisation of the mind and social context. But Retro or Compromise generations often take the management decisions in corporate houses,

which is why Digital Zap has a huge disconnect with many industries today. A few exceptions would be Google, Apple, Nike, Microsoft and Cisco.

Digital Zap at the cusp of the century: Differences in attitude are clearly visible—Retro reads a newspaper at home, Compromise gets the news via Internet in the office, while Zap stays in touch with a mobile device on-the-go. Retro writes letters, Compromise phones and a Zapper texts messages. But the Zap generation is in tune with the world's diverse ways; the future of business lies with them.

When they entered the 1990s, the Zapper children were conscious of, and using, digital technology that had started overpowering the world. Soon, Compromise or Retro generations may disappear; the generations may be Digital Zap Mature, Digital Zap Ripened and Digital Zap Youth. The way the US Baby Boomer generation dominated the second part of the 20th century, Digital Zap will dictate terms in the 21st century.

You have Digital Zapper employees, consumers or shareholders who command you, vendors who can be your customers. A consumer on the road could be your employee, shareholder, or activist. Of course such instances prevailed before, but today's digital diversity has made them highly visible. The more you think, act and align with the below-30, the more you connect to the world's happenings. Irrespective of whether or not they are the spenders, Zappers influence decision-making in every family purchase. Drive the enterprise with Digital Zapper values; you'll have a smooth drive into the future. ■

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