



ESL Podcast 568 – Describing Brisk and Slow Business

GLOSSARY

banner – very good, better than expected or better than anything that has happened before

* It was a banner year for Charlie, who got perfect grades, found a great job, won the lottery, and fell in love.

to launch – to start a new project, program, business, or organization; to begin selling a new product or service

* When did they launch the new marketing campaign?

line – a group of related products with the same brand name

* All the teenagers love this line of clothing.

to keep up with demand – to be able to produce or manufacture at least as much of something as people want to buy

* During the long snowstorm, stores weren't able to keep up with demand for flashlights, water, basic medicine, and canned food.

to fly off the shelves – to be sold very quickly and in very large quantities

* The new Harry Potter books flew off the shelves and the bookstore sold out within an hour.

to sing a different tune – to have a different experience than before; to talk about something that has changed very much

* You think being a parent is easy, but you'll be singing a different tune once you have kids of your own.

foot traffic – the number of people who come into a store, restaurant, or business; the people who walk in and out of a building

* Our store would get a lot more foot traffic if we were on a busier street.

brisk – very fast and energetic, with a lot of movement and excitement

* Does she always walk at such a brisk pace? I can barely keep up with her.

all the rage – very popular; something that everyone wants to do or have

* This band is all the rage among the college students.



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to beat down (one's) door – to break a locked door so that one can enter a room or building; a phrase used to describe people who want to do or have something very badly

* In the early 1990s, students who majored in computer engineering had employers beating down their door even before they graduated.

passé – no longer popular or fashionable; old-fashioned; outdated

* When Meg realized that her clothing and hairstyle were passé, she decided to get a makeover.

inventory – the items that a company owns and is waiting to sell

* How many boxes do we have in inventory?

to unload – to get rid of something, either by selling it or by giving it away, especially if it isn't of very good quality

* They need to unload their old house, but in this market it's almost impossible to sell it for a decent price.

fickle – changing one's mind frequently, especially about what one does and does not like

* Her boyfriend is so fickle! One day he says he loves her and wants to marry her, and the next day he's flirting with other girls at a bar.

to cry in (one's) beer – to drink beer when one is very sad or depressed because one thinks the beer will make one feel better

* Bartenders are used to seeing customers cry in their beer, and they often try to start a conversation to help them feel better.

to pull up a chair – to sit down next to someone at a table and enjoy a meal, drink, or conversation with them

* It's great to see you! Please pull up a chair so we can talk for a while.

sob story – a very sad story; an explanation of why a person is feeling sad

* They spent all night sharing sob stories about their ex-boyfriends.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Clint mean when he says, “every product is flying off the shelves”?
 - a) The products are falling and breaking at the stores.
 - b) The products are being sold very quickly.
 - c) The products are being stolen by criminals.
2. Why isn't Yao's company doing well?
 - a) Because customers are dissatisfied with the product quality.
 - b) Because it doesn't have a good inventory management system.
 - c) Because its products no longer meet the needs of the market.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

banner

The word “banner,” in this podcast, means very good and better than expected or better than anything that has happened before: “The 1990s were a banner decade for the housing market.” The word “banner” also means a very large, rectangular, horizontal piece of paper or fabric with writing and/or images on it, used to advertise or to announce the name of something: “In the parade, each band carries a banner with its school name.” On a web page a “banner ad” is a rectangular advertisement, usually at the top of the website, that one can click on to learn more about a product or service: “Do you think this banner ad will get the attention of potential customers, or should we make it more exciting?”

unload

In this podcast, the verb “to unload” means to get rid of something, either by selling it or by giving it away: “They’re having a garage sale to unload all the junk in their garage.” The verb “to unload” means to take something out of a car or truck: “Could you please help me unload the groceries?” Informally, “to unload” means to vent, or to share negative emotions freely, usually letting another person know that one is very angry: “Have you ever unloaded your feelings to your boss and then regretted it the next day?” Finally, the verb “to unload” can mean to take the bullets or ammunition out of a gun or another weapon: “Always unload the gun before you put it away, just in case the kids find it.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Business owners want their businesses to grow, but sudden growth can “present” (show) many “challenges” (things that are difficult to deal with). When business “takes off” (begins to do very well), the company’s existing “resources” (money, time, materials, and staff) are usually “insufficient” (not enough) to keep up with demand.

When business takes off, a company usually has to “hire” (employ) additional staff members to manufacture the products or deliver the service, maintain good customer relations, respond to “inquiries” (questions), and more. Then the company needs to hire even more staff members in human resources and other administrative departments to manage and train those new employees.

Growing companies also “struggle” (have difficulty) to “build up” (increase) inventory to keep up with demand. When customers suddenly want to buy more of the product than before, the “warehouses” (large buildings where products are kept until they can be sold) quickly become “depleted” (empty). If the company cannot manufacture additional product quickly enough, potential customers may become angry when they aren’t able to buy what they want.

Finally, many companies struggle with their “cash flow” (the availability of money to cover immediate expenses). This is especially true for companies that receive payments long after they have sold the products. If customers have 90 days to pay their “invoices” (bills), the company might soon find that it doesn’t have enough money to pay salaries and continue to manufacture additional amounts of the product. Companies can usually get a “loan” (borrowed money) to help with their cash flow, but this requires careful “anticipation” (thinking about what will happen in the future) and financial planning.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 568: Describing Brisk and Slow Business.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 568. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to become a member of ESL Podcast, and receive a Learning Guide for each of our episodes. You can also support our podcast by making a small donation to help keep these audio files free for the world.

On this episode, we are going to be talking about when business is good – when a company is doing well, when they are doing brisk business, a lot of business – and when they are doing not so well, slow business. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Clint: Anya! Long time no see. Let me buy you a drink. I'm celebrating.

Anya: Oh, yeah? What's the good news?

Clint: My company has had a banner month. Since we launched our new line of software, we're having trouble keeping up with demand. Every product is flying off the shelves.

Anya: Wow, that's great news. Everybody I talk to is singing a different tune. Foot traffic is down and business is slow – really slow.

Clint: That's too bad. I thought that Yao's company was doing brisk business. Six months ago, he was selling a line of cell phones that was all the rage, and customers were beating down his door to get one.

Anya: That was six months ago. It's a different story now. Those cell phones are now considered passé, and he has inventory he can't unload. You know how fickle the market is.

Clint: I'm sorry to hear that. How about you? How's the travel business?



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Anya: Why do you think I'm sitting here crying in my beer? Pull up a chair and I'll tell you my sob story.

[end of dialogue]

Clint begins by saying, "Anya! Long time no see." This is an old expression which means it's been a long time since we have seen each other. "Long time no see. Let me buy you a drink." Of course, if he's buying her a drink that means they're in, usually, a bar and the drink will be a beer or wine, possibly a Cuba Libre with a little bit of lime on top – yeah! So Clint says, "I'm celebrating." He's happy about something; something good has happened and he wants to celebrate.

Anya says, "Oh, yeah? What's the good news?" Clint says, "My company has had a banner month." When you say you've had a "banner (something)," as an adjective, it means very good, better than expected. We often use this in talking about a company and how much it is selling, or how well is doing, but it could also be, for example, about a person: "Charlie had a banner year. He got good grades, he found a new girlfriend, and he won the lottery." That would be quite a year! Actually, he won the lottery and then got the new girlfriend, so if you're looking for a new girlfriend just win the lottery!

Clint continues, "Since we launched our new line of software, we're having trouble keeping up with the demand." "To launch (something)" means to start a new project, a new program, maybe even a new business. In this case, Clint's company is starting – is starting to sell a new line of software. When we use the word "line" in talking about business products or services we mean they are a group of related products. Sometimes we use this term in talking about the name or the brand of a product, for example: "He likes the Guess line of jeans." That's the kind of jeans – the brand, the name – the specific kind of jeans that he likes. But in that line, usually there are several different products that are somehow related or similar.

Clint's company is launching a new line of software, and they're having trouble keeping up with the demand. "To keep up with (something)" is a phrasal verb meaning to be able to reach something, to be able to do what you're required to do. In this case, you're able to keep up with demand. The "demand" is people who want to buy things from you; it's the willingness of people to buy your product. There's two parts in any business: there's supply, which is what you produce, and then there's demand, which is what people want. So, Clint's company needs to keep up with the demand, or keep up with demand, meaning



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they need to make sure they have enough things to sell for the people who want to buy them. He says, “Every product is flying off the shelves.” The expression “to fly off the shelves” (shelves) means to sell something very quickly. A “shelf” is like a flat area where you put things in a store so people can see them. Usually there are more than one shelf, so there are several shelves (the plural). “To fly off the shelves” means to sell something very quickly, So Clint’s company is selling these pieces of software very quickly.

Anya says, “Wow, that’s great news. Everybody I talk to is singing a different tune.” A “tune” is like a song; it’s music. “To sing a different tune” (tune), however, means to have a different experience than someone else, usually to have a different experience because something has changed a lot. For example, Anya says that although Clint’s company is successful, other people she has talked to – other businesses – are not successful. She says, for example, “Foot traffic is down and business is slow – really slow.” “Foot traffic” is the number of people who come into a store or a business that come in to buy something. So, if there are fewer people coming, there are fewer people buying, and therefore business will be slow.

Clint says, “That’s too bad. I thought that Yao’s company (Yao must be the name of a friend of theirs) was doing brisk business.” “Brisk” (brisk) is an adjective that means very fast; often it means with a lot of energy, with a lot of excitement. When we use it to talk about business, however, we mean that they have a lot of success, that they’re selling things very quickly. Clint says, “Six months ago, Yao was selling a line of cell phones that was all the rage.” When we say something is “all the rage” (rage), we mean it is very popular, something that suddenly becomes popular and everybody wants to buy it. A few years ago there was a dance song called “The Macarena,” many years ago. It was all the rage; everyone wanted to get this song. [Jeff sings]

*Dale a tu cuerpo alegría Macarena
Que tu cuerpo es pa’ darle alegría y cosa buena
Dale a tu cuerpo alegría, Macarena
Hey Macarena*

I’m very sorry about that; really, I am! Well, that’s what we mean by “all the rage,” very popular. So, Yao’s company was popular six months ago in fact, customers were beating down his door to get one of these cell phones. “To beat down (someone’s) door” is a phrase that means to do anything to get this product. In this case, it means that the product is very popular, that all of the customers wanted to buy one of these cell phones.



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Anya says, “That was six months ago. It’s a different story now. Those cell phones are now considered passé.” When we say something is “passé” (passé), with an accent mark over the “e” because it is a foreign word, we mean it is no longer popular, it is old-fashioned; out of date, we might say. Anya says that Yao has inventory he can’t unload. “Inventory” are the things that a company owns. So if you makes cell phones, somewhere you have a bunch of cell phones in your building ready to sell. That’s your inventory. “To unload,” in this case, means to sell. But “unload” can also mean to give something away, especially if nobody wants it. To try to get rid of something is another meaning of unload. “Unload” has other meanings as well, as does the word “banner” that we began our dialogue with; look at the Learning Guide and you’ll find more explanations. Anya continues, “You know how fickle the market is.” “Fickle” (fickle) means to change your mind frequently, especially about what you like and don’t like. One day I like popcorn, the next day – eh – I don’t really want any. I’m fickle; I change my mind a lot. Anya says “the market,” meaning people who are buying things or business in general is fickle – it changes quickly.

Clint says, “I’m sorry to hear that. How about you? How’s the travel business?” So apparently Anya is in the travel business: airlines, railroads, that sort of thing. Anya says, “Why do you think I’m sitting here (here in the bar) crying in my beer?” The expression “to cry in your beer” means to drink beer or alcohol because you are sad or depressed and you think that the beer will make you feel better. So, “to cry in your beer” means to be sad and to try to make yourself happy by having a beer. Anya says, “Pull up a chair and I’ll tell you my sob story.” “To pull up a chair” literally means to take a chair and put it next to someone to talk to them. More generally, it means sit down and listen to someone who is going to tell you a story. So you pull up a chair when you are about to listen to a story, and if someone says “pull up a chair,” they mean listen to my story. Her story is a sob (sob) story. “To sob,” as a verb, means to cry very emotionally; a “sob story” is a sad story, something that would make you cry: “The girls spent all night talking about their sob stories related to their ex-boyfriends.” Something you might want to do over a beer!

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

Our dialogues are never passé here at ESL Podcast. That's because they're written by the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Come and listen to us again – pull up a chair next time here on ESL Podcast.

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