

What the heck is Domo and why should you care?

If you watch as much TV/cable news and commentary as I do, chances are good that you've seen an advertisement for something called Domo. It's been running a lot over the past couple months. In case you've missed it, here it is:

Do you understand what Domo is from this commercial? Apparently it's something that allows you to "connect with anything in the company" and gives you the "company data in one place." And let's not forget, it will help Jeanne, who is always cold (huh?). The tagline on the commercial is Domo: For the good of the company.

This commercial is successful in making you wonder what Domo is, and maybe, like me, you go search it out on the web.

Take it to the internet

Some internet research into Domo reveals that it is a software company that deals in “business intelligence” and “data visualization.” A visit to Domo’s website has the description “connecting your data, systems and people” in the navigation bar. The home page has a tagline/descriptor that says: “Everybody on the same page, all the time. Run the business from your phone.”

Here you do learn more about it. When I scroll down there is a part of the home page called product benefits where I learn that Domo is “the fully-mobile, cloud-based operating system that unifies every component of a business. Data becomes decisions, ideas turn into action.” Someone needs to explain to Domo that this is not a listing of benefits, but rather an actual description of the product.

Then I click on “product” on the navbar. I get this content:

Domo creates a truly digitally-connected organization.

The sum of Domo’s parts deliver a virtuous cycle of business optimization. Everyone knows more, works together better, and gets more done, faster.

(And here we find a new contender for unintelligible business jargon: “A virtuous cycle of business optimization.”)

But what is it? And why do I care?

I don’t know about you, but I am still confused. I am confused because at no point does the ad or the website explain what exactly we are talking about and why being connected to all your data and systems in one place (apparently your phone) makes things run better.

There are so many issues both with the website messaging and with the TV commercial. The website and the commercial feature taglines, descriptors, slogans, product benefits, a product description—and none of them match up. The website prominently features a phrase that tells you you can get to everything from your phone. Is this the main selling feature?

Who should hear about it?

It's clear that the target audience for the TV commercial is a CEO or a COO of a company. We know this because we have the self-effacing female administrative assistant who starts by saying she's not the "c-anything o," and ends by saying that the CEO, to whom she is writing the email suggesting the company get Domo, is really the one who runs things.

How is it then that the lowly admin knows about this amazing product? And what I really don't get is how having data visualization on your smartphone is going to help Jeanne who is always cold?

The bottom line

Domo, with its short and easy to remember name, has succeeded in building brand recognition and perhaps even increasing its website traffic. What is less clear is if has succeeded in getting customers. There's a lot of explaining that needs to be done about what Domo actually is, how it works, and why you need it. To be successful in your branding, you need clear and consistent messaging and a strong selling proposition.

Domo has many messages and several reasons (maybe too many) for you to consider getting it.

What do you think? Do you understand Domo? Do you need Domo?

You may have noticed that the DBMC website has been spruced up a bit. During the "remodeling" I refrained from blogging so

that there would be no new content to migrate to the new site. But now I am back! Let me know what you think of the new website.

I really liked that Super Bowl ad for Doritos

But I don't ever buy Doritos. I also never drink Mountain Dew. I certainly do not drink Bud Light. Or Michelob Ultra. I don't use Tide. And I am not about to go get life insurance from Mass Mutual.

If you prefer real beer to Bud Light, no amount of clever/funny/slick ads will change your mind. If you, like me, avoid sugary sodas, having Morgan Freeman appear in an ad drinking one, is not going to make you run out and buy a case.

They are memorable

As a marketing communications person, I've been closely watching Super Bowl ads for the past 20 years. When I worked at an ad agency in Boston in the 1990s, we had time set aside to view the Super Bowl ad reels, and discuss. If you study Super Bowl ads, you can see that many are memorable, and are often discussed for years after they aired. Here, check out this list of the top spots from the last 30 years and see how many you remember.

They cost a lot

Super Bowl ads are very expensive: expensive to produce (how much do you think Morgan Freeman got paid to swill the Dew?) and expensive to place. They are very high profile, and are seen by millions of people. Most of these ads are what the industry calls “image ads.” That is, these ads promote a brand’s image more so than making a sale. They raise “brand awareness.” And yet, any advertiser that has the budget necessary to run ads on the Super Bowl already has brand awareness. So why bother?

But do they have a good ROI?

To use an industry term, what exactly is the ROI (return on investment) on a Super Bowl ad? What do you think? Do you think the high investment provides the returns to justify doing so?

If advertising is better, why bother with PR?

Last night, at a happy hour for the Washington, D.C. chapter of the ASBPE, I got a chance to meet the managing editor of the *Washington Business Journal*, Vandana Sinha. I asked her about the change I discussed here last week, where the *Business Journal* is now charging for personnel announcements in their “People on the Move” section.

Sinha told me that companies are actually very happy about the change, because they can now be assured that their announcements will be printed. Companies feel they’ve gained control over the process.

Paid vs. earned

That reaction points to the advantage of advertising over public relations, and it's the difference between paid and earned media. If you pay for ad space, you get it. You can place whatever ad or information you choose (within certain limits).

When you rely on media relations efforts to obtain coverage for your organization, you are not assured of success. It will depend on whether what you are trying to get out there is deemed "newsworthy" by the editors/journalists at the media outlet you are targeting. If you get coverage, you've "earned" it.

If we are at a point, due to limited resources and dwindling subscriptions, where reporters and editors are stretched to the point that they no longer can entertain pitches and read press releases, what is the future of media relations? Furthermore, if media outlets are searching for more ways to bring in revenue, by seeking various sponsorships and now charging for announcements (and in effect making something that was previously earned into paid), where does that leave a media relations practitioner?

Clearly, if you pay for your media (advertising), you are guaranteed not only coverage, but coverage that you like. What is the incentive for organizations to hire anybody to do media relations?

Media relations is a tactic

For many years, public relations practice seems to have been more focused on media relations than on strategy and image management. It was easier to do publicity than it was to counsel clients on other ways to improve their public standing.

In my opinion, the practice of media relations has to evolve

(or even disappear), if it hasn't already. No longer can agencies simply churn out press releases, pitch editors, and earn media for their clients. That is become increasingly unproductive and difficult to achieve. Additionally, the way people consume news has changed dramatically. There are few true mass media outlets left, and many more targeted, specialty channels.

The media landscape has changed

Because of the new media landscape, public relations, where the practice is about managing perceptions of an organization, has to re-focus its efforts away from media relations. It's important to recognize that media relations is just a *tactic* to help PR achieve its objectives.

Many PR agencies are already turning away from media relations. Today's PR agencies are doing much more social media, marketing, crisis communications and other practices in order to help organization manage their public presence.

Bring back integrated marketing communications!

PR is not advertising, but both are essential components of any communications plan. Perhaps the future will bring us **communications agencies**, where PR and advertising are integrated. Yes, I know this is not a new concept, but it's one that needs to revisited now that times have changed.

What are your thoughts on media relations practices? Is it something that is still worthwhile? Should PR evolve? Please share your comments.

If you don't get it, you don't get it.

The *Washington Post* runs an advertising campaign with the slogan "if you don't get it, you don't get it." And on Monday, I did not get my print copy of the *Post*. I called the re-delivery number and left a message. Five hours later, I had not yet received a replacement copy so I called again, and left another message, asking for a call back. Then I went to the online complaints, and left two messages—one about the missed delivery and one about another delivery issue I had during my end-of-year vacation.

I didn't get it

I heard nothing from the *Post*. Not one word. No call back and no redelivered paper. No apology. No credit. No nothing.

Subscriptions matter

The *Washington Post* has seen an increase in digital subscribers and a decrease in print subscribers. This isn't surprising since most people seem to prefer to read their news online. However, in terms of advertising sales, which is what pays the bills at the *Post* and most every other newspaper, circulation numbers are what sets advertising rates. Fewer print subscribers means smaller circulation numbers, which means lower advertising rates. Obviously, the less the *Post* charges Macy's and the various other advertisers, the less revenue it generates.

Disregard is disrespect

So subscriptions matter. And yet the *Post* continues to treat its subscribers with, if not outright disdain, complete disregard. Prices are increased every few months, credits are no longer given even though the print subscription charges for

delivery costs, and customer service has been outsourced to Asia, where the agents barely speak English and don't know K Street from Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Washington Post would prefer if you never called them, so they've created an online account/customer service portal. Except it sucks. Every time you want to do something, you have to sign in, and then somehow, you are signed out of your digital subscription. And not everything works. I tried to change my vacation hold dates, and was not able to. I had to call an unhelpful customer service agent.

When I got home from vacation, I discovered that of the six days I was gone, four days of newspapers were delivered. My vacation stop was not honored. I complained online and nothing. Again, no apology, no credit, no acknowledgment of a mix-up.

Here's the bottom line: The Washington Post can advertise for new subscribers all it wants, but until it fixes its broken customer service, it will continue to lose print subscribers (and by extension advertising revenue).

Customer service matters more than marketing in retaining customers. Marketing is about acquisition and customer service is about retention. If you acquire customers just to lose them because of poor service, you are wasting money marketing and you are threatening your bottom line.

Do Super Bowl ads change minds?

I only watched the first part of Super Bowl 50, and halfheartedly at that. I am not a football fan, and I had no reason to root for either the Broncos or the Panthers. Also, I wasn't at a Super Bowl party. The only part that I was paying some attention to was the commercials.

I have always been interested in Super Bowl advertising from a professional standpoint, ever since my first job as a media buyer at a now defunct Boston ad agency. While I was there, one of the media directors gave a presentation about why it had been worth it to spend \$1 million (this was in the 1990s) to run one 30-second spot for a small, up to then unknown, company:

- He said it increased national **brand recognition** dramatically
- And also, perhaps even more important strategically, made this company **look like a big player**, since the other Super Bowl advertisers are generally well established (well funded) brands such as Budweiser and Coca Cola.

Today, Super Bowl ads cost close to \$5 million for each 30-second spot. And then there are the other costs: advertising agency fees, production, talent (and famous talent ain't cheap), which probably tack on another \$1-2 million, making it a huge chunk of the company's marketing budget.

Is it worth it?

Clearly, advertisers think Super Bowl advertising is worth it. And since we don't know what their objectives are (brand recognition, sales, image bolstering), it is hard to say whether these are achieved.

(You can check out who the advertisers were on Super Bowl 50 and link to all the spots in this AdAge article [Super Bowl 50 Complete Ad Chart](#).)

In my opinion, one of the best ads of the night was the Bud Light commercial featuring Seth Rogen and Amy Schumer.

It was genuinely clever and funny. And packed a whole lot of celebrity punch. But, are you going to start drinking Bud Light? I bet that if you already drink Bud, perhaps you will feel more secure about your choice. This is called **social proof**, which means that we believe behavior (drinking Bud Light) is cool if other people (Seth Rogen! Amy Schumer!) think it is.

But, on the other hand, if you are like me, you will never, ever, drink Bud Light. No amount of cute or smart or funny commercials are going to make me choose Bud Light the next time I am at a bar, restaurant or liquor store. I just don't like it.

I have a **hardened opinion**, and it is very hard to change this type of view. By the way, the same goes for my opinion of several other big Super Bowl advertisers including Doritos (don't eat them), Taco Bell (just not going there), and Mountain Dew (really, a monkey-baby nightmare?).

But, on issues where people don't have an opinion or don't have enough information, a Super Bowl commercial can really make a difference. Another ad that was not only funny but very effective was this one for the Amazon Echo, featuring Alec Baldwin, Jason Schwartzman, Dan Marino and Missy Elliot:

This introduced a product and also piqued interest. I'd be curious to know how Echo sales do after this, but just based on Twitter, there was a lot of chatter about it (brand

recognition, check!).

In sum, Super Bowl advertising expenditure is somewhat overblown for brands with strong brand recognition but can be worth it for new products or brands.

What do you think? If you watched the Super Bowl, did you focus on the commercials? Did any make you think differently about a product or brand? Let me know in the comments.

Can you do advertising by algorithm?

You've seen advertising by algorithm every single time you go on Facebook. If you've done an online search for anything (books, movies, clothing, etc.), you will now see a banner ad for that thing or brand. If you've discussed anything with a recognizable name (politician, specific book or movie or brand) on your timeline, chances are you will see a sponsored post about that thing on your timeline. Those posts are automatically generated by algorithms.

Like this one that appeared last week on my Facebook timeline:



Ben Carson sponsored ad in my Facebook timeline

I had definitely mentioned Ben Carson in my status updates. *In a negative way.* I had shared several articles about his horrible “gun control caused the Holocaust” comments. I couldn’t believe that anyone, much less a person running for president, would be so stupid and so offensive.

And then the sponsored ad popped up. Obviously the algorithm “if that then this” recipe says something like “if a person mentions Ben Carson more than once in status updates, then show the support Ben Carson ad.”

But I am the exactly wrong target. I don’t like Ben Carson and what I have been saying about him is not supportive. This sponsored post is a #fail as they say on Twitter, and a waste of the campaign’s money.

Don’t let algorithms fail you!

Automatic advertising has its pitfalls. But is the problem the algorithm or the person that makes the recipe for the algorithm? I suspect it’s a bit of both.

There are at least three steps to successful advertising by algorithm:

1. You have to understand how algorithms work

Advertising algorithms don’t do nuance. They can’t judge emotions—negative or positive. *They can only scan for keywords and then follow recipes.*

Plus, each search engine or social network has its own rules. Apparently for Facebook algorithms, budgets have a lot to do with how and when your sponsored content shows up. Read “The Importance of Understanding Facebook Algorithms, Part 1.”

2. You have to provide strategic guidance

Before you launch any advertising, including online advertising, you must have a strategy in place. You need to define your target audience and be as detailed as possible. You need to define your objectives. You must understand what you want to accomplish.

3. You have to measure

And with online advertising, especially when you are relying on computer-generated algorithms, you have to measure. You want to understand your outcomes. How did your ads do? What kinds of people clicked and did they take any other actions? (It's always about the metrics.)

What would you add? Do you have resources to share about algorithms? What's been your experience with algorithms in advertising? Successful or not so much? Please let me know. And if you want to discuss your advertising or communications strategy, get in touch!

Did Mad Men write this commercial?

Now, I should say upfront that I do NOT watch Mad Men, the AMC series about the advertising business in New York City in the 1960s. However, I do know that it shows the very real sexism of the time that ran rampant in advertising agencies. Women were generally in support staff positions rather than as creatives or agency principals (come to think of it, even in the 1990s, when I worked in advertising, the agency principals were all men...).

On the radio a couple of days ago, I heard a commercial for a home security company. In the spot, a woman is narrating and telling the audience that since her husband started traveling a lot for business, she is afraid to be alone in her house. And because she wishes to retaliate against her husband for taking the job that makes him go out on the road so much, and leaving her all alone , she has decided to get a home security system so that she can feel safe. Now, if she hears a noise, she doesn't need to reach for the Xanax, but rather look at her computer screen and monitor all the rooms in the house. (I am not making this up, except for the Xanax part.)

The commercial makes several assumptions:

- 1.) Women are afraid to be alone (being the weaker sex and all).
- 2.) Only men have (big, important) jobs that require travel.
- 3.) Women can make the decision to buy something, but the husband (who is the breadwinner after all) is the one controlling the household finances.
- 4.) Only married people own homes that would require home security (single people always live in apartments apparently).

(I could add 5.) Marriage is only between a man and a woman , but this is so ubiquitous in advertising that it's a topic for another day).

When I heard it on the radio, I couldn't believe that a company wanted to advertise its services in this way in 2014. Women have been in the workforce for a long time and they travel for business. In fact, I found the commercial to be quite offensive. But clearly, in the mind of this sexist home security company, as a single woman who is not afraid of being in my own home by myself, I am not the target market.

What is particularly a bad marketing decision is to be so

narrowly focused when home security is something that could be sold to every home owner. This commercial not only is **too narrowly targeted but it could serve to turn off potential customers** due to the various outdated assumptions it makes.

Other companies are being more reflective of the reality of gender roles. For example, a national detergent brand has a TV commercial where the dad is doing the laundry of his very rambunctious (and dirty) little girls. Or the insurance company that shows a single mother shopping for life insurance.

We are not living in the 1960s. Companies that use dated (and sexist) notions are alienating potential customers...and that is not good for the bottom line.

*In the Washington area and looking to jump start your blog? Attend the **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1. Sign up before March 21 to get early registration pricing. Registration [here](#).*

Stop! Don't start on that next project until you can answer this

It's January and chances are you are working hard to get the year off to a good start. You may be in charge of creating something—a newsletter, a flyer, an ad—that is intended to achieve a communications or marketing objective. It may be to

publicize an upcoming event or perhaps to solicit support for a cause or maybe you are advocating for a policy change. We'll assume that this project is part of a larger strategy and will help further your overall communications goals.



Before you start any marketing/communications project you should be able to answer these five questions:

1. What is the main **objective** for the piece? Or ask yourself this: What do you want the audience to do with this piece?
2. Who is the **target audience**? Really, who is it? Be specific.
3. What are the top **three messages** you want to convey?
4. Knowing who the target is, what is the **best way to communicate** your message? Will you use graphics? Which ones? What kind of language will you use?
5. Has this piece been **done before**? If so, why are you doing it again? What was it that worked or didn't work before? If not, why are you doing it now?

This may seem obvious to some, simplistic to others, but surprisingly, many people trying to create communications aren't able to answer these questions. Why else do you think we are inundated with useless letters, flyers and brochures? Even if you are a pro, doing this exercise will help you to create a better product, guaranteed!

What is your process for getting communications projects done?

Please share!

I'll have a venti and some politics please

It was not until I saw a full page ad in today's Washington Post that I realized Starbucks has waded directly into the government shutdown debate. The full page ad (right hand page, far forward, four-color, in media buying lingo) has the headline:

Sign the Come Together Petition

You can see the text on the Starbucks home page and apparently, at all Starbucks stores starting today.



019/365 by Joseph
Nicolia on Flickr

Also today, in the Post's business section, Allen Adamson, a branding firm director, is quoted about this Starbucks' move:

It's always risky when brands mix politics and business.

It's quite clear that Starbucks is taking a strong political stand against the shutdown, but I am not sure it will be risky. In fact, it may be a huge win for Starbucks (and maybe

for the government, if it helps end the shutdown). To my knowledge, Starbucks is the first and only national brand that is saying something publicly about the shutdown— and it's always good to be the first and only in marketing. Plus, it is using the petition to have people sign up to get updates, either by email or text. You know what that means: database expansion!

Finally, this is a political ad, but it is not overtly partisan, and that's the key. It assumes that most people are against the government shutdown, and the ad does not point fingers at specific parties or politicians. In this way, Starbucks does not alienate its conservative or liberal java addicts. It may not be your cup of tea, but perhaps it is your venti of coffee!

Did you see this petition in Starbucks or the ad in the paper? What do you think? Wise move or not? Let me know in the comments.

Selling “no”

If you doubt the power of advertising, then do yourself a favor and watch *No*, the movie by Pablo Larrain, featuring Mexican actor Gael Garcia Bernal. The movie (now available in DVD), in Spanish, is set in 1988 Chile, where the government of Augusto Pinochet has been forced by international pressure to call a referendum to see whether the public will support eight more years. Voters who support Pinochet will vote yes, and those who oppose him will vote no.

The No campaign hires Rene Saavedra (played by Garcia Bernal) to come up with a concept. Saavedra, who works for the ad agency hired by the government's Si campaign, has a track

record of edgy, successful campaigns. Saavedra thinks the No campaign needs to feature happiness, thus equating a negative concept (no) with being happy. He commissions a song about happiness and develops a "happy" logo.

As a marketing communications writer and consultant, I was very interested in seeing how Saavedra's concepts were received by the No campaign. Since they were fighting an ideological campaign, they believed you had to make a case to the people (Pinochet has killed, tortured and disappeared thousands of people). Saavedra's reaction is that that would not be a pleasant, nice message. The campaign recoils, saying that of course it isn't a nice message. But Saavedra prevails, getting them to see that people don't want to be scared and oppressed by negativity.

You will need to watch the movie to see how the opposing sides deal with each other, but suffice it to say that Saavedra was right. People respond better to a positive message, or at least pay more attention. He succeeded in putting the Si campaign on the defensive.