Are we seeing more media crises?

This week featured two highly publicized and far-reaching media crises. One was the United Airlines situation, where a passenger was forcibly removed (and hurt in the process) from the plane, after he had been seated and had not agreed to "voluntarily" leave the aircraft. And the other involved White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, who clumsily compared Syria's Bashar al-Assad to Adolf Hitler, and then showed great ignorance about just what Hitler did during World War II.

Twitter outrage

I saw both these situations unfold on social media (specifically, Twitter), and was able to add my observations to many others, both using hashtags and Twitter handles. Social media outrage appears to have caused both United and Sean Spicer to apologize profusely for their mistakes. In today's *Washington Post*, Kathleen Parker argues that in the United case, the Twitter outrage (or "mob" as she calls it) was able to bring the situation to light and make change happen.

It seems that we have more media crises these days than before—but like Parker argues, what has changed is the ability to get these situations in front of more people, more quickly, through social media. So, in fact, we may not be having more crises, but rather more exposure for and to these crises.

Changes…

It seems that United, and to some degree Sean Spicer, have still not adapted or recognized that the media landscape has changed dramatically. Anyone with internet access and a social media account can share their ideas, opinions, facts and more

damning, their video. Also, anyone with a smartphone has the ability to create video on the spot, and then share it immediately.

Ten years ago, if a passenger had been dragged off a plane, there would have been no record of it outside of the memories of the other passengers on the plane. Similarly, Sean Spicer's words would have received criticism later (if at all), not during his press briefing. Fewer people would've been exposed to these situations.

More "eyeballs" available

Today's media crises are happening not because spokespeople and companies are screwing up more, but because more people are seeing it happen. It would behoove any public relations/communications practitioner to internalize that most everything can be publicized very quickly, and may even have incontrovertible visual proof with it.

Why you are failing to communicate on social media

A few weeks ago an acquaintance was coming to town from the West Coast. She posted on Facebook (along with about another five posts the same day) that she was free on a given afternoon and if people wanted to see her, to please message her. Now, I hadn't seen this person in a couple of years, and since I was free on the afternoon she mentioned, I would have liked to get together. But, I hadn't seen her post until it was too late. By the time I messaged her, she had already made other plans since she said that nobody responded to her

post.

In my opinion, she failed to communicate effectively. There are several potential reasons why.

Why #1: Not understanding how social media works.

Chances are good that only a few people in your network will see what you post. First, social media is a continual flow of information from many sources. Nowhere is this more obvious than on Twitter, which shows you everything from everybody in real time. If you missed it, you missed it (unless someone re-tweeted it and it gained traction). And to make that more complicated, the different networks use algorithms to show you what the network thinks you want to see. On Facebook, the default algorithm is set to show “top posts,” which are the posts that more people have “liked.” LinkedIn has a similar algorithm, also showing what it deems are “top” posts.

Additionally, social media provides controls for people to “hide” or “mute” certain users. It’s quite possible you’ve been hidden and thus your posts won’t be seen at all.

In order to work around social media’s constraints, you have to provide relevant content that gets liked and shared, and therefore becomes “top” content.

Why# 2: Not using the right channel for your message and audience.

In this case, this woman was trying to communicate with a handful of her Facebook friends (the ones who live in this area). She may have had better luck by using a more targeted approach. For example, she could have used Facebook messenger to talk directly to those people. Or she could have (gasp) emailed or texted the people she wanted to see.

Different channels and media have different audiences. You probably wouldn’t put an announcement that you are giving away

your kittens on LinkedIn, but you might post on Facebook. LinkedIn is about business opportunities, and Facebook is more personal. You could also try sharing a picture on Instagram of those cute kitties looking for a home.

You have to choose the right channel to make sure you message reaches the right (more receptive) audience.

Why #3: Forgetting that social media is only one communications channel.

If you were trying to, say, promote a new product, chances are good you would use a mix of channels to reach different target audiences. You would also adjust your messaging accordingly. You might choose use an email campaign. Or you could do media outreach. Or you could run some advertising, including Google Ads. Or you could try promotional give-aways. Or sponsorships. You get my drift.

For social media to work, it can’t be your only communication channel. It has to be part of a larger communication plan. Social media is just that—a medium that has social aspects that help amplify your message. It is not a substitute for other media.

You want to get your message to the right people at the right time.

For any communication plan to be effective in this way, you have to use a mix of media depending on who you are trying to reach and when. You need to understand each medium, and what type of audience responds best to that channel. And you will need to adjust your messaging (e.g., length, complexity, benefits you highlight, etc.) for each medium.

Why I share political views on Twitter but not on LinkedIn

Lately, I have seen a couple of opinion pieces written by marketing people that state you should never, ever share your political opinion, at the risk of losing clients and alienating your network.

I don’t agree. I think it depends on several factors and there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. You will need to consider at least two issues:

1. Are you an employee or are you representing yourself? Are you sharing a political opinion for a company or for yourself?

2. Where you are sharing your views?

Let’s start with the where.

I don’t think you should ever share political views on LinkedIn, no matter if you are a company, individual or small business owner. But you should (in certain cases) on Twitter.

LinkedIn is a professional, business-oriented social network. Twitter is not.

People go to LinkedIn specifically to network and to research your professional background. They do not go to LinkedIn to find out about your views on Hillary Clinton.

Twitter is real-time conversation. LinkedIn is more static.

I know that you aren’t supposed to talk about politics or

religion in polite company. But Twitter is not polite company. It’s a rapid-fire issue-of-the-minute national and international conversation. LinkedIn, on the other hand, is not that. It’s a staid, share your credentials and network sort of place.

There are millions of tweets every hour. On LinkedIn, your network probably shares a few updates a day.

People go to Twitter to share their opinion and see what others think.

During the presidential debates it was pretty easy to see who doesn’t live in the United States and who uses automated tweets. Those were the folks who didn’t weigh in on the Clinton-Trump stand-off and/or tweeted about non-political matters.

But it matters who you are, too.

On social media, not everyone is treated the same.

- If you are tweeting as yourself and you are not claiming a company or organization in your Twitter profile, then you should say what you want.
- If you are tweeting in name of the organization, then you need to be very careful what you say.
- If you are representing a consumer-oriented organization (like a restaurant or manufacturer), then you should be probably keep quiet. People do not generally follow a product or brand to see what political views it has.
- If you work for an organization that works in a political or advocacy space, then you must make your views known. People follow political/advocacy accounts precisely because of a specific viewpoint.
- If you are like me, an individual who owns her own business,

then you should make a decision that best fits you. I choose to share my political views on Twitter, not on LinkedIn. Be aware that not all your current or potential clients will share your views, and may choose not to do business with you because of those views. On the other hand, some people will share your viewpoint and will choose to interact with you precisely because of that view.

We are human

In the end, we must remember that on social media, we are not automatons, we are human beings. Sometimes we respond viscerally and in the moment. For example, when people found out about the horrible massacre at Newtown, they shared their horror and some also shared their views on guns.

Human beings have ideas, likes, dislikes and of course, political opinions. While political opinions can incite strong responses, your likes and dislikes can generate controversy too.

You win some, and you lose some

Ultimately, you will need to accept that sharing your opinions (political and otherwise) may create a backlash, or it could result in support. Your opinions can lose you followers, but they may also gain you a following.

What do you think? Do you share your political views? What is the main reason you do or do not? Let me know in the comments.

P.S. If you care about my political views, follow me on Twitter at @DBMC.

Out of sight, out of mind?

I've been conducting an experiment over on my personal Facebook page. I haven't posted anything for more than two weeks. As I expected, nobody has commented on my lack of posting. Nobody has gone to my Facebook page and reacted/commented on anything already there. There's been absolutely no interaction. Perhaps this means I have crappy "friends" or more likely, it means that when you don't participate in social media, people forget you're there.

I've seen this happen with my blog. If I haven't posted recently, my site traffic goes down. When I post something, my traffic goes up. (This is why it's so valuable to have Google Analytics deployed on your site.)

This could never happen "in real life." Even if you were quietly sitting in a room not talking to anybody, people would notice you were there. Perhaps they wouldn't speak to you, but they would see you. I**n social media, to get noticed, you must be active**. You have to post regularly. People will forget your blog if they haven't seen you post for a while. Ditto if you haven't posted recently on LinkedIn (and worse if you don't have even have a picture on your profile).

Many small businesses understand that social media is an important communications channel. However, many don't understand how to make it really work for them. You'll see businesses (organizations and nonprofits too) that think all they have to do is create the Facebook page, get some people to "like" it and nothing more.

The only reason somebody would visit your Facebook page (or website or LinkedIn profile) when you haven't been active is

because they are looking for something specific or researching. And then it would have to come up as part of a query. Even well known brands (the CocaColas and McDonald's of this world) advertise. They want to be top of mind and reinforce their brand promise.

Here's the bottom line: If you are using social media for business purposes, you must be active, even if it means doing paid advertising.

When you are out of sight on social media, you are out of mind.

Is sharing part of your content strategy?

I can't believe that in mid-2016 I am still complaining about this, but it happened to me again just this morning. I came across an interesting blog post about—get this—content strategy, and it had NO SHARING BUTTONS. None. Zilch. There was no *easy* way to share this content out short of me cutting and pasting the URL or using an extension such as Buffer (as Jonathan Rick helpfully pointed out on Twitter).

Think about the user

Here's the thing, content strategy is supposed to keep the "user experience" (or UX) in mind. That means, that you, the content strategist or website/blog owner, need to think about your site's visitors: How do they use your site? What do they need to do on your site? What do they want to learn about you?

How can you make the process easy and intuitive *for them*?

It's about being social

Sharing buttons have been around for years. There are dozens of plugins that allow this functionality in WordPress, and I am sure in any other blogging platform. Not having sharing buttons means you do not want your content to be shared. Which means you do not understand the purpose of content or the social aspect of social media (blogs are social media).

It's not difficult: **Your content strategy needs to include an easy way to share content**. And by the way, sharing content also includes being able to email it or print it (don't get me started on how many recipe sites don't have this functionality).

Make sure it works

But it's not enough to stick a sharing plugin on your blog or website and call it a day. You have to check that it actually works. And that it is providing the right information. And that it is easy to find and use. (Just yesterday, I came across another blog post that I wanted to share, and it did have a sharing button, microscopic, but there, and guess what, it didn't work.)

You will find sharing (and printing) buttons at the bottom of this post. Please consider sharing this so that we can get all the non-sharers on board.

Forcing “likes” is poor business communication (part 1)

A few weeks ago, I told you about how a Udemy instructor requested that I change my review from three stars to five stars because it would help him remain high in the ratings. He had no interest in whether his course merited five stars or why I had rated it three stars. He just wanted me to like him enough to further his purposes.

And then today in the *Washington Post*, I read this article: “This landlord said ‘like’ me on Facebook or get evicted.” Basically, in both a show of poor communication skills and even poorer business law knowledge, a landlord in Salt Lake City, Utah posted notices on tenants’ doors, telling them to “like” the building/complex on Facebook or be in violation of their rental agreement. Naturally, the tenants did not like this at all and many took to Facebook to complain and some threatened legal action, saying that it was an invasion of privacy, etc. The landlord was forced to retreat, and even had to take down the Facebook page because of the various negative comments and ratings that arose due to this move .

You can’t force people to like you.

But hidden in the article, lies the purported reason why the landlord made this move: since there had been pictures taken at a community party, the landlord wanted to have legal authority to post them and tag them. I am not sure if this is an excuse, or it’s real, but the way the landlord communicated this was poor or non-existent.

So again, it is an issue of poor communication.

In today’s social, online world, it is increasingly difficult

for businesses to hide bad behavior. Businesses can't force positive reviews or likes, although many times businesses ask customers to like them in order to give discounts or other preferential information. In this way, the number of likes on a page has become completely meaningless. Similarly, if a business has only glowing reviews, they are suspect, and may not be seen as valid.

Give 'em a reason to want to like you

I am not saying that businesses should avoid reviews or Facebook. Businesses need to communicate better, and more importantly, give customers a reason (through actual good service or products) *to want* to like them and review them positively.

Why do you like Facebook pages? Do you like them to get event information or special discounts? To support a business owner? Let me know your thoughts in the comments.

You don't want shares or likes

Social media is easy – all you need is quotes

Last week, I attended a networking event where a speaker shared her insights about social media, specifically for business (you'd think that by 2016, everyone has learned all about social media, but I digress).

The speaker, a self-proclaimed social media expert who works primarily with small, local businesses, wanted to share with us that "doing" social media is not hard. All you have to do

is to provide content. She gave suggestions for the types of "content" your business could share—articles you find "around," pictures you take, and her absolute favorite, quotes. Basically, she told us, find a "cute" quote and then put together an image featuring said quote and a picture or a background, like this:

She told us quotes do gangbusters on Facebook. People just love them, and then they "like" them and even share them.

OK, I don't have anything against quotes. Sometimes a nice inspirational quote will motivate you or a funny one will make you laugh. We all need quick breaks and reading and sharing a quote is a harmless use of 10 seconds.

It's not about liking or sharing. It's about goals.

But, here's the thing: why are you on social media? If you are on social media as a business, you are not there simply to get likes or shares. Getting likes or shares is great, but you really are using social media to achieve certain business or communications goals, such as:

- Getting people to visit your website
- Establishing your "thought leadership"
- Creating a network
- "Engaging" with your customers and potential customers

Start with why

To quote Simon Sinek, "start with why."

(See what I did there?)

What are you trying to accomplish?

If all you are trying to accomplish is being social or having fun, then go ahead, share all the quotes and funny pictures you want. Get all sorts of likes and shares, and feel good about yourself.

However, if you are trying to accomplish business goals, then be clear on what those are and figure out how to get there. Perhaps sharing an article from your CEO about the issue your service solves, and which links back to your website, gets you both website visits and thought leadership.

Do you know why you are social media? Do you have specific goals for your social media?

Is lazy interaction better than no interaction?

This post is about a phenomenon that I've noticed on Twitter (just in case you aren't on Twitter, I'm letting you know now so you can stop reading).

First of all, here's a question: do you expect a thank you or other acknowledgement when you re-tweet something? I would

like to know for sure (I would appreciate your thoughts, please do share them in the comments) but my gut tells me most people appreciate a thank you but don't expect it or need it.

And yet, there's been an explosion (or at least it seems so to me) in automated 'thanks for your interaction' tweets. You've probably seen the ones I mean:

> *My best RTs this week came from: @xxx @xxx #thankSAll Who were yours? sumall.com/thankyou*

or

> *Thanks to my top interactors!*
> *@xxxx @xxxx*
> *#tweetjukebox*

I see why some people would think this is a good idea. Perhaps they were raised by parents who insisted that you must write a thank you note whenever you get a gift. Or perhaps, they think any interaction, even automated interaction, is better than no interaction.

It's similar to when you send a company an email outlining some concern or question you have and you then receive at automated reply thanking you for your email but not addressing your issue. You could have said that the company's product is killing you and the reply would still say "thank you for your email."

Automated replies and automated tweets may be expedient but they are empty gestures. They have no content. They have no context. And they are basically useless in terms of creating the social media "engagement" everyone talks about.

If the only way you can think of interacting with others on Twitter is by automated thank yous, I respectfully suggest you get yourself off the platform immediately.

Similarly, if you absolutely, positively need to have an app send out canned tweets for you, you may not have the time or inclination to be on social media.

Here are some truths about social media engagement:

- its time-consuming
- there’s effort involved
- personal beats automated every day

What do you think? Are you using these automated thank you generators? If so, what are you hoping to achieve? Are you achieving what you are hoping?

Why you should pay attention to user reviews

From Yelp to Google to TripAdvisor, user reviews can be found easily when you search online for anything, whether it be hotels, services, restaurants and so on. In our social media age, everyone is a critic and has a forum. People are keen to share their experiences, whether it be to warn others about bad service or to express great satisfaction at how a product works.

It’s important for business owners (and for organizations) to pay attention to reviews. Here are four main reasons every business should be actively tracking and soliciting reviews:

1. User reviews identify weaknesses that businesses should

address.

Essentially, reviews are customer satisfaction surveys. Perhaps it’s because we’ve become passive-aggressive as a culture, but people are more likely to air their complaints to a third party. So instead of contacting management, people will go on Yelp and talk about their experience. For example, if you run a hotel, and every reviewer on TripAdvisor complains about the air conditioning, that tells you that you need to address the problem ASAP.

2. User reviews help businesses appear higher in search results.

Reviews are content, and the more fresh content, the better the search engines like it.

3. User reviews give businesses a specific reason to interact with customers.

Whether responding to a negative review or thanking a customer for a positive one, a review gives a business a way to talk to customers beyond the initial interaction or transaction.

4. User reviews can tell businesses more about what customers consider important.

What people choose to highlight when reviewing a business can provide invaluable consumer insight. What types of things are most users praising or complaining about? What makes a user be enthusiastic about a business?

In sum:

Businesses that don’t track customer reviews are losing valuable insights about how they are perceived. Business that don’t respond to reviews are stating that what customers say doesn’t matter, and will miss the chance to improve.

How do you handle reviews? Have you designated a specific person or department to track reviews? Does that same person or department respond to reviews? Please let me know in the comments how your business or organization deals with reviews, and what you have learned (if anything) from them.

When you lose your internet service…

I meant to post earlier in the week. However, Verizon "inadvertently" cut my FIOS line—so I had no TV or internet Wednesday into Thursday. Yes, this is a first world problem. Regardless, it had to be resolved, which involved the thing I despise the most in the world: calling Verizon customer service.

And it was just as bad as I feared. First you have to get through a phone tree (I can't stand talking to machines). And then I got disconnected. Then, when I called back, the phone tree was stuck on whether I had power at my location or not. Thanks Verizon, for thinking I am that stupid that I would think that without electricity I would have working TV/internet. On the third try, I went for the Spanish option, from which I was able to finally speak to an agent (whose

command of Spanish was not the best as he was versed in Spanglish more than Spanish).

To make a long story short, after more than 24 hours without service and after several calls to support, my FIOS is back on a temporary line that will eventually have to be buried (meaning I am still not done with Verizon).

I work from home, so having internet access is essential for me. Yes, I have a smartphone so I wasn't entirely disconnected from the world wide web, but try proofreading a brochure on your smartphone. Not so easy.

The only positive from this fiasco is that it sparked this blog post. Here's what I learned from losing my internet service:

1.**The measure of a company is how it responds to customer problems.** Verizon does not do well on this measure. Verizon, like most companies, is fine *as long as you don't have a problem.* Verizon makes it very hard for customers to talk to customer service agents. It makes customers run around in circles: repeat information, navigate phone trees and so forth. I lost a whole day of service PLUS more than an hour getting someone to help PLUS using data on my phone PLUS having to go somewhere to be able to access the internet to do work PLUS waiting during a three-hour window. If I call to request a credit, I may be compensated for the service loss but not for my time and certainly not for the aggravation. I am sure Verizon is betting that I won't want to lose more time on this, and it may be right. As I said before, I despise calling Verizon's customer service.

2. **Monopolies like Verizon have no incentive to be customer-centric and they don't advertise or promote their customer service.** If you notice, all FIOS advertising is about what great speeds you will have or any other benefits of having WORKING service. There's no mention of the great customer

service that accompanies this “super-fast” internet because there is none.

3. **Some companies provide better customer service via social media. Verizon does not.** Several years ago this was not true. You could get better, faster service from Twitter since @verizonsupport agents seemed to be more empowered than those on the 1-800 number. Now, if you complain on Twitter, Verizon reps will quickly want to move you over to direct message so that they can give you a link to report your problem. Agents on @verizonsupport seem to have little or no ability to actually help or intervene in your favor, unlike @deltaassist, which has the ability to rebook your flight, etc.

4. **The problem is with company policies not with employees.** It’s been my experience that people want to help, but they are forced to follow company policies and procedures, which are not customer-friendly. The technician that came to my house was far more helpful and on the ball than the agents on the 1-800 line. He was empowered to do what he had to do to fix the problem, whereas the agents in the call center were forced to call other departments and work within constraints.

5. **You must have a “plan b” or “plan c.”** If something fails (you could lose power, or your car is in the shop or any other unexpected problem), you have to find a work around. In this case, my county libraries all offer wi-fi, and have desks with power outlets. That was the way to get some work done for me.

And lastly, on a personal note:

6. **I have to try to stop sweating the small stuff.** I get upset because I expect things to work and work well. And they often don’t. Yesterday, I was reminded that our time on earth can be very short and you just don’t know how life will turn out, so perhaps worrying about Verizon is a complete waste of time. I had my annual eye doctor appointment, and the usual optometrist was not there. I was shocked and very sorry to

learn that she died suddenly after an aggressive illness. She was around my age. She was a very nice person and I always enjoyed chatting with her. The doctor told me she had been very healthy and health-conscious, but this illness came out of nowhere. She was gone in a matter of weeks. Rest in peace Teresa, you are missed.

Enjoy your Labor Day weekend! How did we get to the last weekend of “official” summer so fast? Sigh.