Yeah, it’s personal

I have written before that marketing communications goes beyond nice brochures, great ads and a fabulous website. There is an element of marketing that is more personal—it is how each and every customer, or potential customer, views your company or organization. With the rise of social media and the ability of posters such as myself to critique anything and everything, this has become even more important.

Last week I had my hair cut at a salon in DC. I went there because a friend recommended it. Check. However, I got there, and waited for my appointment. This in spite of the fact that they charge YOU if you are late for your appointment. The hairdresser never apologized. She was neither good nor bad, but she did tell me, weirdly enough, that she had been written up “on one of those sites on the Internet” and she hated the Internet for this reason. My answer is that if more than one person is saying the same thing, there is a problem. I checked on the salon and indeed lots of people had mixed reviews of the place, some worse and some better. However, many of the complaints had to do with attitude. Things like the receptionist was rude or was not very accomodating. Now listen to me—these things MATTER. More today than ever.

Similarly, in everyday interactions with businesses, businesses should really take care with details. Here are a couple of examples from my experiences. I went on a long trip back in February, and used a travel agent because of the complexity of the trip. She was not very good and since I wasn’t spending the type of money she is used to dealing with, she barely gave me the time of day. Additionally, she gave bad advice! I wrote a letter to the travel agency owner. And guess what—I never heard from her. Not one word of acknowledgment or apology. So PORTFOLIO TRAVEL on Wisconsin Avenue in Washington, DC, you will never see my business again, and certainly I will never recommend you.

Last week, someone asked me for a proposal. I sent it to her by COB, the same day. She claimed she would get back to me by the end of last week. She did not. I followed up on Monday and she did not even have the courtesy to respond to my email. Why would I ever want to work with someone like that?

So in summary, every personal interaction with a member of the public has the potential to get you good or bad publicity. Every. Single. Interaction. When people are upset these days, they make their voices heard through a very public forum, the Internet. There are dozens of sites like Yelp.com devoted to rating businesses and products. Some health care insurers are now allowing you to rate your doctor too. No one is immune. There is an expression, “mind your ps and qs.” Or “cross your ts and dot your is.” Whatever it takes, remember that every time you interact with the public you are representing your company. You are a marketing ambassador. Act like it.