

Beware of the dog(ma)

You may have heard about the ongoing discussion in the public relations world regarding the usefulness of the press release. Many are saying the press release is dead. Some are not so quick to give it last rites. Then there are those that are dogmatic about it: “always send a press release” or “never send a press release.”

Always and never are absolutes. To be dogmatic is to state a position unequivocally, to be absolute about it. The problem with dogma in communications is that nothing should be absolute. In the press release issue above, I would say that it *depends*: What is the news, who is the target audience is and where do you want to communicate the news.

A definition of dogma

Here's what my Webster's dictionary says dogma is:

1. Something held as an established opinion, esp. an definitive authoritative tenet.
2. A doctrine or body of doctrines concerning faith or morals formally stated and authoritatively proclaimed by a church.

Notice what the two definitions have in common? The word authoritative, which is a synonym for official, conclusive, and **dictatorial**.

Examples of dogmatic communications thinking

Back when I started working in advertising, when I was a lowly media coordinator and my job was to place print media buys, I had a supervisor named Eileen. Eileen's dogmatic belief about newspaper advertising was that you *never place a print ad in Friday or Saturday newspapers*. Never. (This was in the 1990s and people did not have the Internet. They read actual

physical newspapers.)

But, back in the '90s and even today, the entertainment/weekend section always came out on Friday. I thought most people would get the Friday paper just for the entertainment section, to see what was going on, what movies were playing, etc., so I argued with Eileen that Friday was actually a great day to be in the paper. It was an uphill battle. Eileen had been taught, and believed with absolute certainty, that Friday was, in her words, a dog day for ads.

Recently, I had an online discussion with a website design firm that states it *never uses WordPress for its clients because it is "always" more vulnerable to hacking*. Instead, the firm always uses Adobe products. When presented with an alternative view (WordPress has open developing practices with thousands of plug-ins that increase functionality, for example) the design firm shot me down. It has a design dogma that disallows it from seeing the benefits of something alternative, or even using WordPress for some clients and Adobe for others, depending on needs.

In the blogging world, there seems to be a dogmatic belief that *you must blog at minimum once a week and more is better*. I have subscribed to this belief, but lately, I think it depends. I have seen blogs that I follow drop to blogging once a month with no ill effects (at least not visible...I don't know if it affects their SEO).

Dogma may be necessary in religion. Faith requires absolute conviction. Communications, however, must be flexible. Things are constantly changing. Look at social media. Five years ago it was all Facebook and Twitter. Today, we have Medium and Tumblr and Pinterest and Instagram and on and on.

An alternative approach: use guidelines instead of tenets

You cannot afford to be dogmatic in communications. Always and never will leave you boxed in and unable to react to

situations. A better approach is to create requirements and guidelines for your communications that take into consideration the why, what, where, who and how of what you are communicating.

**Do you have a communications dogma? What is it?
Please share.**