

Wishing for better communications in 2021

Count me in as one of the many who are glad that 2020 is over. I am optimistic about the year ahead, in spite of the horrendous and deadly insurrection last week at the U.S. Capitol.

There's a lot to look forward to this year: a new administration, worldwide COVID vaccinations, and the subsequent return to normalcy. Maybe by the end of 2021 we'll be back to attending in-person events!



As a communicator, I thought the biggest lesson of 2020 was the need to adapt and quickly. Events went from in-person to virtual. Many workers were no longer commuting to their offices (I wonder what happened to drive time radio costs!). There was (and continues to be) a lot of stress and anxiety. Those realities impacted marketing efforts. We saw an increase in email marketing, on-line presentations and events, and a general toning down of advertising.

Now that we are in a new year, I have five wishes to make 2021 the year for more effective, high-impact communications.

1. Use email marketing more effectively

At the end of the year I got bombarded with donation pleas from many nonprofits—and I mean several in just one day. On December 31, 2020 it was particularly bad, as I got emails from each and every organization I have supported, and one organization sent me four or five emails! And then there's Overstock.com, which sends at least an email every single day—one day offering me 12% off and the next 15%. The lesson here is: Don't overwhelm your customer or donors. Be strategic and think of your recipient. And then there's the many small groups who are still sending all-image emails. The problem here is that unless the recipient downloaded the images, your email appears blank. Follow some guidelines before you send out that next email. Jill Kurtz wrote a great Email Marketing Checklist, which is worth a read.

2. Leverage your website

Your website is your reception desk to the world. If people have questions, chances are they will check your website before they call. It follows your website should have all the information they need. Keep it updated, especially with any COVID protocols you are following. For many, the idea of spending money to update a website in these times may be anathema. However, an outdated website will result in customer

frustration and maybe even lost business.

3. Focus your social media efforts.

This is they year to choose your social media platforms and embrace them. The truth is that you can't effectively manage too many platforms. You won't be able to have meaningful engagement if you have to monitor too many streams. Choose the platforms that *perform* best for you, where you have the most traction and/or where the majority of your audience is. Do you really need to be on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, etc? I am not saying that you can't try out a new outlet, but if you do, and it works well, perhaps you replace instead of adding. And if you are using multiple platforms, create content with each platform in mind. The post you use on LinkedIn should not be the same as the one you use on Twitter.

4. Use Zoom or Livestream more effectively.

Check out my post about this. I've spent too much time having to hear people explain how to use Zoom, muting/unmuting, and just plain wasting time reading lengthy presenter bios. People are spending much more time in front of computer screens, and want you to get to the point. I can read the bio myself if you send it in an email or provide a link to it during the presentation.

5. Copy edit and proofread all your marketing materials, including (perhaps especially) social media posts.

The other day, my local police department posted about how a driver ended up with her car on the train tracks because she used the gas pedal instead of the "breaks." And the local weather Twitter feed told me there would be "peaks" of sun. These are very small examples, but when you make these type of mistakes, you are showing a lack of care. So, proof everything before it goes live. And say what you mean clearly and concisely, and if you need help doing so, use a copy editor!

Happy New Year 2021! Let's work on making it better for our communications. If you have a 2021 communications wishes, share them with me in the comments.