

Business networking is a form of marketing communications

Last week, I attended the Women & Business: An Atlantic Exchange, which was an event showcasing women's business concerns organized by The Atlantic magazine. One of the segments included an interview with Melanie Whelan, CEO of SoulCycle, a boutique indoor cycling studio.

Ms. Whelan spoke at length about the SoulCycle culture and its business model. Soul Cycle concentrates on providing a special experience to its customers, where they feel part of a community. She said that SoulCycle has never advertised, instead relying on satisfied users to become brand ambassadors, to discuss their positive experience with friends and in social media, promoting the company. In this way, SoulCycle has grown from being a one-of studio on the Upper West Side of New York to having several studios in many large metropolitan areas.

Ms. Whelan offered several interesting insights about her company's corporate culture, brand experience and market growth, and it's worth watching her presentation:

Word-of-mouth marketing

Over and over, you hear businesses claim that their best marketing is word-of-mouth and/or referrals. In SoulCycle's case, it seems that word-of-mouth marketing has paid off in spades.

And yet, at this very forum, which was intended both to help women entrepreneurs get some solid information and to network with each other, I saw first hand how hard it is for most people to network and connect with each other.

Networking can be hard for some

There were women who seemed very shy, and couldn't seem to even smile or even look at strangers.

There was a woman with bad body odor. Whether or not she was aware of the issue, I am not sure, but I would think many people steered clear of her.

There was a woman, standing next to me at the buffet line, who barely acknowledged an ice breaker comment I made. Even after being given an easy way to chat, she refused to do so. I am not sure if it was lack of interest or shyness or perhaps she was just hungry.

Then there was the socially awkward woman I sat down next to inside the auditorium. She dropped her papers and I picked them up and handed them to her, and she didn't even acknowledge me or thank me. She then started taking notes off my printed agenda, without so much as a word or an "excuse me, but may I see your agenda." And even worse, she kept falling asleep and leaning on me. Seriously.

But networking is an essential business skill

Then there was a woman who smiled, shook hands and introduced herself, making it easy to converse. She understood the power of networking. As she said to me, networking isn't about closing a sale, but rather about meeting people who will remember you and perhaps refer to you later on when a need arises for them or in their circle.

Networking is the most basic form of marketing communications. It's your opportunity to introduce yourself and your business on a personal, one-to-one level. It is an essential part of business and professional development.

It's not easy for most folks, myself included, to walk into a room full of strangers and just chat it up. But there are ways to make it less intimidating.

Think quality versus quantity. You don't have to meet everyone in the room. If you meet one or two people, and get to know them, you will be doing well.

Think about what you do and how to best communicate it. It's easy to get stuck in thinking everybody understands what you do, but chances are good that they won't. Think of a simple way of introducing yourself and your business, and that allows for questions to follow.

Understand that other people in the room are just as uncomfortable as you are. A smile goes a long way in making people relax.

If you are still having trouble connecting, perhaps you should consider some outside help. Perhaps you can hire a business coach to help you refine your approach and to give you pointers.

How do you network? What works best for you? Please share in the comments.

One word plus one word equals new word

“Can someone share what they use to backup their files?”

This was the subject line in an email to a Listserv I'm on. In this case, the person wrote backup (one word), which is an adjective, when he meant to say back up (two words), which is a verb.

There are several things about English that seem to trip up a lot of people. This is one of those things.

It happens when you have two words that are often used as a pair and you put them together in one word. However, the new word is not the same as the pair. In some cases the pair is a verb and the resulting new word is an adjective. In some cases the resulting word is a noun.

Back up is not the same as backup.

When back up is two words, there's some sort of action taking place, which means it's a verb. You put your car in reverse gear so you can *back up* (verb) out of your driveway. Maybe you *back up* (verb) your files on an external hard drive (I don't but I should). You *back up* (verb) your claims with proven information (although some presidential candidates don't).

When backup is one word, it can be an adjective, meaning the word is modifying or describing something. You may have a *backup* computer in case your usual computer conks out. You may have a *backup plan* in case something goes wrong. Sometimes, a backup is a noun: You may have your *backup* with you on a thumb drive.

Shut down is not the same as shutdown.

At the end of your work day, perhaps you *shut down* (verb) your computer. Now your computer is in *shutdown* (adjective) mode.

This past Wednesday here in the Washington area, the Metro was *shut down* (verb) for more than 24 hours to conduct emergency inspections and repairs. Metro's general manager said the *shutdown* (noun) was necessary.

Every day is not the same as everyday.

Every day (noun) that passes I think about some *everyday* (adjective) tasks that can get done quickly.

Just some everyday information to pass on to you. Happy Friday!

P.S. If you get tripped up with this type of thing in your documents, I can help fix it. Contact me about copy editing.

What to do about the “no response” response

We’re all familiar with the “no response” response, right? That’s the response that we don’t actually get but that in effect means no.

It happens with all sorts of queries and in all communication modes. Perhaps you sent a text message asking your friend if he wants to go to the movies, and you don’t hear back. Perhaps you sent an email inquiring about a job, and all you got in response was nothing. Maybe you are old school, and left a colleague a voice mail message, and she never called back.

Since this “no response” has become the *de facto* “no” response, we’ve come to assume if we haven’t heard from somebody that he or she is not interested in what we are offering, or proposing, or asking about. But, this assumption can be problematic.

No more follow ups

Sometimes (not many times but still it happens) people genuinely did not get your message. The email ended up in the spam folder or the voice message got inadvertently deleted. But because you’ve become used to not expecting an answer unless the person is interested, you’ve stopped following up.

And you and the recipient may miss out on a potential opportunity.

Too many follow ups

And then there are people who don't give up until they get an answer. They may be clueless or they may be aggressive or both. When they don't hear back from you, they keep getting in touch. They keep calling and texting and emailing. They don't get that your lack of response means no and it also means "please stop getting in touch, I don't want to deal with you!"

It's just plain lazy

By assuming that everybody understands that no response means you aren't interested, in effect, you are taking the lazy (and rude) approach. Why bother answering an email with a polite "thank you but not interested" response when it is much easier to just ignore and delete?

It may make you look bad

You may think that not responding communicates that you are too/busy. You may actually be coming off as self-important or uncaring.

What to do?

We've all been on either side of the "no response" response. Sometimes, we get overwhelmed and we forget to respond. And sometimes we sit around waiting for a response that never comes. What, if anything, can we do about it?

If you get the "no response" response: Accept that you can't control what other people do. You don't know their motivations or reasoning. So, don't automatically assume a "no response" equals no unless you really know the person and his/her *modus operandi*. Do follow up once, but probably no more than that. If again, you don't get a response, let it go. Remember, you can only try to get in touch but you

can't force an interaction.

If you are avoiding responding: Become aware of the messages you are sending when you don't respond. Is it that you can't or don't want to say no? Why is that? Are you not responding because you are overwhelmed? If so, perhaps you need to see about reducing your workload. Perhaps you do it because you don't like confrontation. If so, ask yourself what you think will happen.

What are your thoughts? What do you think when someone fails to respond to you? Or are you the one failing to respond?

How watching TV can make you a better content marketer

As a huge fan of British mysteries, I am always reading books by authors such as Peter Robinson, Peter Lovesey, Ann Cleeves, and Ian Rankin. And I watch many British detective shows such as "DCI Banks," "Inspector Morse," "Lewis," and "Vera." Many of these shows are directly based on British authors' books ("Vera" is based on Ann Cleeves' Vera Stanhope series), or based on the characters developed by the authors (Colin Dexter's character Inspector Morse has inspired three TV shows: "Inspector Morse," "Lewis," and "Endeavour").

Last Friday, I finished reading Ann Cleeves' "Harbour Street" and coincidentally (weirdly, really), the "Vera" episode ("On Harbour Street") that aired Saturday on WETA UK was based on

that very book! It was a great opportunity to see how the TV adaptation of the book stacked up— what was the same, what was different.

The same

The main premise of the story was exactly the same: an older woman, Margaret, is stabbed on the Metro. Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope's sergeant, Joe Ashworth and his daughter are on the train when the dead woman is found. Vera investigates, leading her to a house on Harbour Street in the town of Mardle, where the murdered woman lived. Vera pursues the investigation by talking to several people who knew the victim. Most of the main characters are the same: Vera, Joe, Margaret, Kate, and Dee (Margaret's friend, an alcoholic prostitute).

Yet different

Other characters are different or even completely eliminated. For example, in the book, Vera has a constable named Holly, but in the TV adaptation, her name is Shep. Also, last names are different for many of the characters. The TV episode follows the same general plot as the book but eliminates a few side stories (e.g., a burning down of a building for insurance purposes), changes several details (e.g., Dee falls to her death in the TV show whereas she is stabbed in the book) and even has a different murderer (not going to give that away!). The action in the book takes place right before Christmas and it is cold, snowy and the roads are icy. In the TV adaptation, the action is set in what could be summer (or late spring, early fall).

What is content marketing?

Content marketing is essentially re-purposing content, that is, taking various types of informational material (for example: a how-to video, a news article) at your disposal, and using it in different ways to help market your product or advocate for your cause.

How do you re-purpose content?

When you re-purpose content, you are generally taking material that was produced for a certain purpose and/or medium (e.g., a long-form article in a trade publication) and you are adapting to a different purpose and/or medium (perhaps a blog post).

Screenwriters re-purpose content, right?

If you want to adapt or re-purpose content successfully, you can learn from what the “Vera” screenwriters did with “On Harbour Street.” Basically, they took a 376-page book and made it fit the time and story constraints of a one-and-a-half hour TV show. To achieve this, they concentrated on the main character, Vera (since she’s the title character of the TV series), while cutting out non-essential stories and extraneous characters. Perhaps because it is easier to film outside during the warmer months, the timing of the action was changed from winter to summer.

There are three steps you should follow when re-purposing content:

1. Know and understand the original material

- What is the essence of this content?
- What are the content’s most important points or key messages?

2. Understand the medium where the content is to be re-purposed.

- What are the length/time/space constraints?
- When is the content going to appear?
- Will you need graphics or better explanations?

3. Understand and know the audience

- Who will be accessing the content?
- How will they be accessing the content?

- How are they different or the same as the audience for the original content?
- Do they have special needs?

Bottom line: To re-purpose any type of content, you must be able to maintain the content's original meaning while making it relevant to new audiences and different media.

On writing: Chuck Tanowitz thinks like a journalist

This month, I asked Chuck Tanowitz to give me his thoughts on writing. He studied journalism, and later worked in radio and television news. From there, he made the transition to public relations. Throughout his communications career, Chuck has relied on having strong writing skills and a sharp mind, as you will read in his answers below.



Chuck Tanowitz

Name: Chuck Tanowitz

Twitter: @ctanowitz

Chuck Tanowitz is a content, marketing and PR professional living in the Boston area. His written pieces have appeared under his name and under that of his clients, in everything from the *New York Times* to the deepest trade technology publications.

1. What role does writing play in your work and how important a skill is it?

Public relations relies on writing. Pitching media requires it, but so does social engagement and the by-lined articles that clients want us to write all the time.

2. Does writing well still matter in a digital/text/emoji world?

It matters now more than ever. Writing well is not just about typing in a few words, it's about communicating. Even if you're using a few emojis in your texting, your job as a communicator is to convey a thought, emotion or opinion using the tools at your disposal that are appropriate of the medium of choice. If that medium is text and the emoji helps convey some crucial aspect of that thought, then go ahead and use it. But the words remain necessary and the shortened length mean that the editing skills honed over a lifetime are all that much more important.

3. What's the best advice you've received or would give on how to improve writing skills?

Good writing is good editing.

4. What are your top three writing resources or references (digital or paper-based)?

It sounds silly, but my top writing resource remains Google. It helps me with spelling, grammar, usage and fact checking. You can't trust everything, but mostly it's a solid resource. My second-favorite is my social network of fellow writers. Third is the AP Stylebook.

5. Do you follow a style guide, and if so, which one?

Being a former journalist, I tend to follow AP Style. An old employer of mine hated the Oxford comma, and now I continue to struggle with it.

6. What's your top writing/grammar/usage pet peeve?

I hate passive writing. Not that I hate it in all circumstances, but I find a lot of young writers fall back on it to hide that they're actually missing information and facts. We used to do that in TV when we would say "a man was shot" when we lacked information about who fired the gun. TV got around some of that by eliminating verbs altogether, with

lines such as “gunshots today leave one dead and two injured.” But if writers simply looked for the verb “to be” and cut it back, they’d find their writing greatly improved.

7. What’s your favorite word and what’s your least favorite?

No one word is better or worse than another, the context matters most.

What resonates for you? Let me know in the comments. And be on the lookout the last Thursday of every month for On Writing, where professionals share their thoughts on one of the most important communications skills.

Truth vs. facts vs. journalism: an editorial

I just watched the movie “Truth,” starring Cate Blanchett and Robert Redford, about questionable documents, used by producer Mary Mapes and reported by Dan Rather on *60 Minutes II*, which purported to prove that George W. Bush may not have served his full duty in the National Guard.

The movie came out last year around the same time as “Spotlight,” also a movie about journalists. “Spotlight” (which I saw last year) tells the story of the *Boston Globe* reporters who investigated child abuse by Catholic priests in Boston, and the subsequent Church cover-up. Both movies are based on real stories, and both deal with reporting, but that is where any similarity ends.

“Truth” portrays a major screw-up at CBS. “Spotlight” portrays a major triumph by the *Boston Globe*.

Also, "Truth" is about broadcast journalism and "Spotlight" is about print journalism and the differences are stark. In "Truth," facts are not properly sourced essentially because of time constraints associated with broadcast deadlines. In "Spotlight," the reporters are told they have to dig out and track down the sources until the story is right.

The bottom line is that having enough time to fact check and substantiate a story is the deciding factor between getting things right and screwing up.

These movies also show a different understanding of what a journalist's role is. As the title implies, "Truth" is about getting at a truth, even though the facts may not be right. "Spotlight" is about not only getting the facts right, but getting enough information so that what is being presented can't be easily challenged.

Facts and truth are not the same.

Facts are provable. The high temperature in Washington, D.C. on February 15th was 29F as recorded by the weather watchers at Reagan National Airport. You can check that.

Truth is a belief, and it is changeable. What is true to someone, such as he/she believes that chocolate is the best flavor may not be true to someone who prefers vanilla. The only facts here are that chocolate and vanilla are flavors.

When we write, and especially when we edit, we have to check the facts. Are names spelled correctly? Are the numbers used accurate? And further, we have to check the sources. Just because many people are saying something on social media does not make it factual. Not being careful with fact-checking leads to a story blowing up as it did in "Truth." It may or may not be true that President Bush skirted his National Guard service, but it will never be proven without checking sources (are they reliable?) and facts carefully and thoroughly.

Is the campaign trail a fact-free zone?

And that brings me to political journalism today. As has been evidenced countless times on the campaign trail, many of the candidates are not dealing in facts, but rather in their own truths or beliefs. And many political journalists are caught up in trying to question the “truth” without knowing or researching or checking the facts. So we hear statements that are not fact-based such as America is “less safe” today because of Barack Obama’s policies or that Obamacare is hurting the economy. These are not facts. They are beliefs and they are not provable.

Journalists who are covering the campaign have a duty to find and point out the facts. Sometimes we’ll see them do this. For example, on *Fox News Sunday*, Chris Wallace pushed back against Ted Cruz’s assertion that Obamacare has been a job killer by quoting the jobless rate, which is the lowest it’s been since 2008. Cruz then punted and blamed the fact checkers, saying they were not impartial. You can read more [here](#).

But not all journalists point to facts. We’ve seen many debates where the candidates’ assertions are not challenged. This is partially because there are so many such assertions, and partially because journalists do not necessarily know the facts. Just this weekend during the Republican debate, most of the candidates said that Obama should not (could not?) appoint a justice to the Supreme Court to replace Antonin Scalia (who died Saturday). Some claimed there was precedent for this. We’ve since learned of the so-called Thurmond rule, where, according to Senator Strom Thurmond, no appointments would be confirmed in the summer previous to the end of a president’s term. However, this is not actually a “rule” but rather a tradition, and one that is not really enforced. But, facts aside, Republican candidates keep insisting there is precedent. We even saw Ted Cruz state that if Obama appoints someone, the Second Amendment would “die.” I didn’t see any push back, perhaps because this is so belief-based there are

no facts to counter the argument with.

And then, if journalists do push back...

Remember when Donald Trump claimed he saw Muslims celebrating the 9-11 attacks in the streets of New Jersey? To him, the truth was United States Muslims celebrated the country being attacked. The facts were that no such outdoor celebration occurred in New Jersey. None. Some journalists pushed back, citing the facts, but Trump doesn't care about facts, especially if they do not substantiate his beliefs. And especially if continuing to refute facts gives him more publicity, but that's another story.

Our democracy is in real danger when beliefs trump facts. Journalists must do their job make sure that they are presenting facts and not beliefs. They should not let the pressures of the 24-7 news cycle make them into Mary Mapes, seeking some higher truth but not checking the facts. They should not let candidates' questionable assertions go unchallenged. Many people—voters—get all their information from one source, their favored news outlet, and don't fact check or examine the source of the information. They assume the information is reliable and make decisions based on it. Those decisions help elect presidents and do have consequences.

Do you feel that journalists are doing the best they can? Could they do better? What makes a good journalist? Please share your opinions in the comments.

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.

On writing: Carrie Morgan rocks the status quo

Welcome to the first “On Writing” interview, a monthly series in which a marketing communications pro will answer seven questions about writing. This month, public relations consultant and author Carrie Morgan of Rock the Status Quo agreed to be the first ~~victim~~ pro to participate. Find her thoughts below.



Carrie Morgan

Carrie Morgan

Author of *Above The Noise: Creating Trust, Value & Reputation Online Using Digital PR*. Senior digital PR consultant – public relations, content marketing, social media & SEO. Author. Feisty word nerd. #PRprochat founder.

Organization: Rock The Status Quo

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1. What role does writing play in your work and how important a skill is it?

As a PR professional who focuses on digital PR, I'd consider writing to be my most important skill, and something that quickly sets me apart from competitors. It drives over 90 percent of my revenue, since I specialize in content marketing, messaging and search engine optimization, allowing me to achieve amazing results for my clients. I constantly work to improve my storytelling skills, too, which is a fascinating trend to watch right now. My love of writing and helping others led to publication of my first book, *Above The Noise*. It launched just this week, and can be found at Amazon, Barnes & Noble and many bookstores.

2. Does writing well still matter in a digital/text/emoji world?

Writing absolutely matters! From a great headline driving social shares and viral activity to a 140-character tweet, our ability to wordsmith drives conversion and success, or feeds client failure. A picture might say a thousand words, but a few words strung together creatively have REMARKABLE power. As

an industry, communications professionals don't put nearly enough emphasis on the importance of writing skills. It's an essential skill. In my opinion, every minute you invest in improving your writing skills (and reading – which improves writing skills almost by osmosis!) delivers a huge dividend. As far as self-education goes, the benefits far outweigh the energy and time it requires to improve. LinkedIn long-form posts or Medium are great places to practice if you don't want to create your own branded blog. LinkedIn particularly works well, since it also helps you build a personal brand – always a solid career move.

3. What's the best advice you've received or would give on how to improve writing skills?

Read as much as possible, since it boosts your vocabulary and grammar skills through exposure, write as much as possible to practice your skills, and invest at least a few hours each month learning something new. Michael Margolis provides a wonderful free eBook on business storytelling skills at GetStoried.com. I'm excited to say he'll be a guest on #PRprochat in April, if you'd like to join us!

4. What are your top three writing resources or references (digital or paper-based)?

I don't use very many tools, actually, I just write as often as possible. My blog is my #1 tool, since it is the primary place that I practice my writing skills. Twitter is fabulous for teaching brevity while remaining compelling. I also curate marketing and PR content every day, which keeps me on top of new trends and tips throughout the day.

5. Do you follow a style guide, and if so, which one?

I follow the AP Stylebook for public relations content that will be exposed to journalists or formal media platforms – such as press releases, byline articles for a media publication and media pitches. For other kinds of content

however, such as blogging or infographics, I fit the style to the outlet. Many non-journalistic media use the Chicago Manual of Style or Strunk & White. A blog post for a business journal might use AP style, but a blog post for a client should be consistent with the style already used on their site. Blogging especially can often use a less formal style of writing. I match the style to the platform as much as possible.

6. What's your top-most cringe-worthy-writing/grammar/usage pet peeve?

My biggest pet peeve? That's a tough one... I really hate it when people retweet something with an error in it. If you liked it enough to share it, take a second to fix the error before you pass it on. Otherwise their error becomes YOUR error. Another pet peeve are press release quotes that sound like every other quote. Be bold, take a stand and write something with a bit of thought leadership to it.

7. What's your favorite word and what's your least favorite?

My favorite word is "heinous"—I think because it's a word my teenage son really hates, so the look on his face and his reaction when I use it encourage me to repeat it as much as possible. My least favorite word is any misspelled word.



Instead of waiting for media to share our message, we have the ability to **instantly** do it ourselves.

Not only do we share news at our own pace and control, we can share it in a way that creates dialogue.

Carrie Morgan



Available on Amazon or B&N now!

Carrie has just released her book, *Above the Noise*. Writing a book has its own special challenges, so I asked Carrie to elaborate.

How long did it take you to write this book?

This book is several years in the making, because I started out with a different book than the one actually published this week. It took FAR more time to write than I expected, though – about six months of weekends and nights. Building the platform before I approached publishers with my book proposal was about eighteen months of solid effort, on top of time invested to actually write the book.

Did you face any obstacles and how did you overcome them?

It was an interesting journey! For my first book idea, *Digital Haystack*, I spent over a year and a half building my platform, then reached out to New York book agents until I landed one, thinking that would help me land a book deal. It wasn't a good experience. Basically, all the agent did was take a book proposal I'd already created, and email it out to a small database of contacts. I had to push her and babysit the process every step of the way. When we finally landed a deal,

I ended up firing the publisher (who wanted to change the name of the book, a decision from its board of directors who knew nothing about marketing as an industry and wanted to use a term that's been outdated for a decade on a book of modern best practices). After I'd cancelled that contract, with no help from the agent, I ended up also firing the agent because she made no effort to sell the book. So that I wouldn't have to pay her a commission, I restructured the book and sold it within twenty minutes of sending out my new book proposal. It was an interesting process, for sure, and I learned some valuable lessons. I'm already working on my second book.

Any tips for people thinking of writing a book?

Build an audience before you write the book, and begin marketing LONG before the book is published, otherwise you'll never rise above the noise to be heard. You also won't be able to draw the interest of publishers, if that's your goal. They want pre-existing audience for the book. There's also a common misconception that publishers will do the book marketing for you. False! They are printers with lackluster marketing skills who only invest budget marketing authors who are already proven to be successful. They do next to nothing for new authors. You must be prepared to do it yourself AND have a budget for that marketing. Also, be very careful of self-publishing. I'd estimate that 90% or more of self-published books were written for vanity reasons and missing the kind of quality a publisher would require, but it's a huge market where everyone makes money except for the author. Also know that self-publishing carries a different kind of clout than something put out by a publishing house. Know the difference, and make sure the road you choose fits your goals for the book. One last thought: before I began the journey to being an author, I had no clue that over 95% of authors make next to NO MONEY on their book. Write it for other reasons. I wrote my book to build up my reputation as a consultant, not to sell books.

Stay tuned to this space for upcoming On Writing interviews. And remember, if you need to create or recreate marketing materials, I am here to help!

Too many words, too little meaning

Warning—this post is somewhat political since it uses a politician as an example, and not in a flattering way.

In case you missed it on Tuesday, Sarah Palin endorsed Donald Trump in the campaign for Republican presidential nominee. Her speech (if in fact what she did can be called that) has been described as rambling, patriotic, fiery. What is has not been described as is clear (or meaningful for that matter). The New York Times has a great article, *The Most Mystifying Lines of Sarah Palin's Speech*, that analyzes different parts of the speech and interprets what Palin may have meant, a kind of Palin translation if you like.



Tossing up a salad

Following is an excerpt of Palin's speech (taken from a Washington Post article and transcript):

"Trump's candidacy, it has exposed not just that tragic ramifications of that betrayal of the transformation of our country, but too, he has exposed the complicity on both sides of the aisle that has enabled it, okay? Well, Trump, what he's been able to do, which is really ticking people off, which I'm glad about, he's going rogue left and right, man, that's why he's doing so well. He's been able to tear the veil off this idea of the system. The way that the system really works, and please hear me on this, I want you guys to understand more and more how the system, the establishment, works, and has gotten us into the troubles that we are in in America. The permanent political class has been doing the bidding of their campaign donor class, and that's why you see that the borders are kept open. For them, for their cheap labor that they want to come in. That's why they've been bloating budgets. It's for crony capitalists to be able suck off of them. It's why we see these lousy trade deals that gut our industry for special interests elsewhere. We need someone new, who has the power, and is in the position to bust up that establishment to make things great again. It's part of the problem."

Here's how this paragraph could be rewritten for clarity:

Trump's candidacy has exposed all sorts of problems in politics and has shown people how the system really works. Seeing these problems has made people angry. Campaign donors have been dictating to the politicians they support, in order to keep our borders open to get cheap labor from Mexico. Also, the politicians have been creating bad trade deals that help special interests in other countries. We need a new type of politician who has the power to bust the establishment, which is part of the problem.

Notice the difference?

It's shorter, it gets to the point, and it avoids jargon and cliches.

Yes, I know, it no longer has "color." Palin is known for throwing in all sorts of colorful phrases such as "he's going rogue left and right." When giving a speech, the speaker has more leeway to use attention-getting phrases than in written communication. In Palin's case, her reliance on "color" overwhelms any message that she may actually be trying to deliver.

Palin has been criticized for delivering "word salad" speeches that toss together a bunch of words and phrases. Her speech on Tuesday seems a perfect example of this tendency.

How to make one of your biggest marketing decisions

Do we agree that your website is one of your largest (if not *the* largest) marketing properties? If so, then read on.

When you are a solo business owner like me, you don't have an IT department or a webmaster. And so it's up to you to deal with your website. Last week I changed web hosts for the fourth time in the more than 15 years that I've had this website. It's something I've been wanting to do for a while for many reasons (perhaps the subject of an upcoming post) and I am glad I did. Going through the process showcased exactly why it's so important to choose the right host.

Choosing a website host is a crucial business decision

Since your website is your front office on the Internet and it needs to remain open and accessible at all times, choosing your web host is a critical business decision. There are dozens if not hundreds of website hosts (do a search and you will see), many offering dirt cheap hosting packages. The host you choose can have a tremendous impact on your business, and your decision should not involve price alone.

Here's what you want from a website host:

Near perfect reliability. In hosting parlance, this is called "uptime" and you want to make sure it is as close to 100% as possible. If your host's servers go down frequently, that means your website goes down frequently, which basically means lost business for you. And when servers are down, you won't get email either, which also means lost business.

Fast website loading times. Website loading is partially due to your host's servers (capacity, whether they are shared or dedicated) and partially due to factors on your website (number of plug-ins, design). According to my current host, the closer the servers are to your customers, the faster the website loading times. Website loading times may even affect your SEO ranking (read more about it here).

Good if not great customer service. If there's a problem, you want to be able to speak to someone who can (and wants) to help you. You are looking for customer service that is available 365/24/7, and if you are in the U.S., preferably based here. You may also want to look for an employee-owned company, because the people you talk to will have a real interest in solving any problems you may have.

Clean record. Some hosts, due to their cheap rates, attract a lot of spammy businesses, which in turn get the host blacklisted by some ISPs. This is big. Your host's standing can affect whether your emails get delivered (my previous host was blacklisted by Yahoo and my emails to Yahoo addresses

would all bounce back) and even your SEO standing.

Ability to deal with your website specifications. You want to make sure tech support understands your platform. For example, if you run a WordPress site, you want a host that works with WordPress; and if you run ecommerce on your website, you want a host that can handle secure transactions.

Ease of use. My last hosting provider had two different accounts for me. One was a billing account, with a separate user name and password, and a “cPanel” account, for handling website administration. If I needed to update credit card information, I had to log in to billing, and to change website parameters, to cPanel. To make it worse, you couldn’t access cPanel from the the main hosting website, but rather through an obscure URL you had received when you signed up. Needless to say, this was not easy or simple. It wasted a lot of my time too.

Here are three other important tips:

- 1. Don’t rely on your developer/designer’s recommendation.** Many website developers have reseller accounts with a website host, so it’s in their own interest to sell you that. Do your own research. There are several resources to help you identify a good host. I like SiteGeek. Check out reviews and see what people are saying. Are many people having the same issue? What is the main complaint? Are more people leaving a host than transferring in?
- 2. NEVER register your domain with your website hosting company.** If there’s a problem, they will be able to hold your website hostage. Instead, choose a separate registrar. It may not be the cheapest option, but it will save you hassle in the long run, and let you maintain control of your website.
- 3. Have a separate email account on Gmail or something similar.** Use this for the administrative emails that you

get from your website hosting company and domain registrar. If your website and email are down you will still be able to access your stuff, particularly if you forgot your user name and/or password, or need to respond to a work ticket.

Remember your website is an integral part of your business and marketing efforts. Money you spend on your website—whether it be on design and development, hosting, listing—is a business/marketing expense that I can assure you will provide you a return on your investment. Cheaper, especially in website hosting, is just cheaper, not better.