

What makes a successful LinkedIn long-form post

Last year, LinkedIn opened up its publishing platform to all. Since then, we've seen an explosion in these long-form posts. Everyone is trying it, and why not, after all, LinkedIn is the professional social network and we want to expand and influence our business network in order to get more business or land our next job.

The idea, according to the LinkedIn help blog, is to share your expertise. It says:

Your long-form posts should share your professional expertise. Write about challenges you've faced, opportunities you've seized, or important trends in your industry.

And yet, many times people are pushing their products/services/ebooks/webinars on us. Instead of providing information or resources, these people are merely trying to sell us something.

Tell, don't sell

I don't know about you, but I don't like being sold to. If I am shopping for something, I want a salesperson to help me figure out what I should be looking for. I don't want a salesperson to push something.

It's about trust

On LinkedIn, your network is probably composed of people you have worked with or gone to school with, or perhaps met volunteering or through a networking event. Your network is not a bunch of random strangers (or at least, it shouldn't be). You've earned your network's trust. This is why when somebody spams us on LinkedIn we get pretty upset. And this is

why we should get upset when somebody writes a LinkedIn long-form post that is designed solely to sell something.

To stop breaking your network's trust and get their attention instead, write LinkedIn posts that are worthwhile.

What makes a top-performing post?

A read of the top performing posts on LinkedIn shows they share the following characteristics:

- They answer questions (for example a current top post is titled "What makes a leader")
- They give tips
- They have fun headlines
- They have a strong point of view, sometimes controversial
- Having notoriety or celebrity helps (The top post when I looked yesterday was by author Daniel Goleman)

Make your posts work for you

Based on this, here are six tips to make your LinkedIn posts stand out and work for you:

1. Write about a subject you know well. If you are an expert on UX, then write about that instead of the five life lessons you learned from the seminar you attended last week.
2. Share your knowledge/expertise. Don't charge for it by making people pay for your webinar or your ebook.
3. It's not academic writing—make it conversational.
4. Don't rant. There are plenty of other places you can vent—perhaps at your local pub to your friends.
5. Write clearly. Avoid spelling and grammar mistakes by asking someone to edit/proof it.
6. Spend time working on your headline. Think of it as your book cover. If it is appealing, people will read through (and maybe even buy it).

What is your experience with LinkedIn long-form posts? Have you written one? If yes, how did it perform? If no, what has stopped you?

Is content marketing necessary to business success?

Content must be the buzziest term in the communications /marketing field right now. Everywhere you turn it seem you find discussions of content strategy and marketing. There are articles on how to create or re-purpose content. There are discussions on what is the best content and what channel is it ideally shared on.

But is content marketing absolutely necessary for you to achieve your business objectives?

What is content marketing exactly?

First let's start with a definition of content marketing. According to the Content Marketing Institute (I highly recommend you check it out for its excellent and useful information), content marketing is:

the practice of creating relevant and compelling content in a consistent fashion to a targeted buyer, focusing on all stages of the buying process, from brand awareness through to brand evangelism.

Basically, you create content in order to sell something (your ideas, your product, your service) or obtain something

(support).

I agree wholeheartedly with the theory that you should be providing information for your potential customers or supporters to make informed decisions. I am a huge fan of blogs in particular as an easy way to create and share content.

But, what about those that don't "do" content

That said, how do you explain the success of a content strategist I know who doesn't even have a website, much less "content"? Or the digital media expert who has so much work she hasn't blogged in months? Or the public relations agency that last tweeted in 2012?

And then there are the many successful small businesses (e.g., plumbers, caterers, etc.) that may have websites but that don't usually have the staff, budget or time to handle blogging, tweeting, creating infographics, etc.

Another type of lead generation

What do these non-content producers have in common? Positive word-of-mouth. These business thrive on referrals and generally do not rely on internet searches as their main source of leads. (As an aside, there are referrals that come in the form of online reviews, and this is a subset of search engine optimization that relies on local search.)



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Content is not always online

Here's the other thing: content is not always online. Content—a fancy word for information—can be shared face-to-face, in person. What you say to others about your business helps to market your business. This is why we develop key messages and elevator pitches. This is why we attend networking events. This is why we host coffees and get-togethers.

Yes, content works to achieve business objectives

The bottom line is that content marketing works, but it is not always the online and social media versions that are the most successful.

What are your thoughts? How much content do you produce? Is content at the heart of your marketing strategy? Let me know in the comments

Are you talking at or talking with your audience?

I recently attended a panel discussion where the five speakers on the panel were going to share their insights about industry trends. The first speaker got up (literally, up out of his seat) and started providing stats and information *about his business*, and then proceeded to ask the audience for questions. The moderator had to jump in to remind him that questions would be taken after all the speakers had their say.

This speaker didn't seem to know what the panel's topic was (trends) and he was completely focused on sharing what his business does, even though the audience wasn't there to hear that. Worse, he acted as if he was the only one presenting by pacing in front of the other panelists.

The speaker was *talking at* the audience. He was giving a speech that was all about him and did not respond to what the audience wanted or needed.

Does the expression "given a talking to" convey positive feelings for you? I bet it doesn't. Nobody likes to be *talked to* and being *talked at* is almost as bad. Both imply that the speaker has power over the audience or that the speaker is superior in some way.

On the other hand, if someone is *talking with* you, there's a conversation going on. There's some give and take, even if it's not verbal. Speakers who are *talking with* an audience are paying attention to what the audience needs, they are responding to cues and they are engaging the audience's attention.

You want to be talking *with* your audience. You want to be *responsive* to their needs.

There are three basic steps to make sure you are talking with your audience:

1. Understand **who** your audience is
2. Understand **why** the audience is there
3. Understand **what** the audience needs from you

You get bonus points for adjusting your speech depending on **where** you are and **when** you are giving it.

Have you sat through a speech that was all about the speaker? Did you feel talked at? Did it bother you? Please share your stories in the comments.

What you meant to say

“What you meant to say” is a new feature here on the Caffeinated blog. It’s meant to be a compilation of the (many) grammatical/spelling/word choice mistakes we see all around us, all the time. It occurred to me that I should start keeping a running list for fun, and then of course, I thought it would make a fun blog post. These are all real examples. Readers are welcomed to add their findings.



By Paulo Paraiso via Flickr

For the week ending July 10 (questionable word/usage is bolded):

Subject line on a spam email: This Video Is A Must Watch.
[Effects Us All}

What you meant to say: Affects

Tweet: Come check out our conference room and **setup** a tour!

What you meant to say: Set up. As two words, set up is a verb, whereas setup is a noun.

Tweet: CAE stands for Certified Association Executive. **They're** the hallmark of a committed assoc. professional.

What you meant to say: It's

Tweet to a car rental company: Great service. Great cars. Will **defiantly** pick [name] again for my next trip

What you meant to say: Definitely, showing how you can't ever rely on autocorrect or spell check.

3 website blunders that are costing you readers

Have you checked your analytics lately? What's your bounce rate? If it is high, it means that people arrive at your website only to "bounce off" a few seconds later. This means they are not reading your content. This means they are not

clicking through to other pages. And of course, this means they are not buying your product, supporting your cause or contacting you to learn more about your services.

Here are three website blunders that could be costing you readers (and support):

1. Audio/video autoplay: Nothing, and I mean nothing, makes me close a website faster than auto sound/video. It always startles me and then it irritates. Do not, under any circumstances, enable autoplay on your website. Not many people want noise (talk/music that is unwanted is noise) suddenly blasting out of their device.

2. Links to abandoned social media feeds: Sending folks to a Twitter account that hasn't been updated in months (or worse, years) is a recipe for failure. *If you can't keep up with a particular social media account, do not link to it.* People do check social media accounts because they want to see what you've been up to. If there's nothing there, they assume you are not active, not just on social media, but in general.

P.S. Plus, it's essential that your social media descriptions be up to date, and relevant.

3. Your way or the highway: Are you enabling pop-ups to force people to sign-up for a newsletter before being able to access your site? Are you asking people to subscribe to email in order to get updates instead of allowing RSS subscriptions? Telling people to go to Facebook to read the latest news? If you are *imposing* your favorite tactic, you are effectively telling people that it's your way or not at all. People appreciate choice. And different people like different things, so offering options is always good (not too many options mind you).

Are you committing any of the above three blunders? If not, there are several other issues that may be turning off readers, including:

- Making your content hard to read (font/type that is too small or white type on black background)
- Website it too busy (too much going on, distracting)
- Typos and/or spelling/grammatical mistakes
- Outdated information
- Not enough information

What sends you off a website? Please share your website peeves with me in the comments.

First, ask this one question

“What do I need to know about this?”

Here’s the thing—you don’t know what you don’t know. And if you don’t know, you can’t ask the right questions in order to get the answers you need. So you have to start from zero, and ask “what do I need to know about this.” You’ll want to ask someone who has more knowledge or experience than you.

What does a new home buyer need to know?

A couple of weeks ago, I was talking to an acquaintance of mine, who happens to be a top-selling real estate agent (she’s sold something like \$25 million in property). I was telling her about my first few months as a homeowner, when I had to have a bunch of things fixed. The real estate agent asked me if I had gotten a home appliance policy. I told her that I hadn’t and that I didn’t even know about it. She went on to tell me she negotiates that for every single one of her new home buyers. She told me my real estate agent *should’ve* told me about it.

What do you look for in a real estate agent?

This question of course lead to a discussion about my real estate agent, whom at first I really liked, but, after being in my house for a few months and dealing with a bunch of issues, I came realize didn't really do her job well. She didn't point out what I needed to know as a new home buyer. And I didn't know the questions to ask her, since I said before, you don't know what you don't know.

The more I learn about real estate and home ownership, the more I realize that my real estate agent (unlike my new acquaintance), was just not very good. She was mediocre but the fact is, it was my own fault for choosing to work with her without having educated myself more about what to look for in a real estate agent.

You need to acknowledge that you don't know

I should've started by asking myself: "what do I need to know before buying a house?" I could've asked friends, I could've read books, I could've done more research online. I didn't.

I did watch a lot of HGTV (don't laugh, it was very helpful), especially *House Hunters* and *Property Virgins*. I watched enough HGTV to know that you have to look at the bones of the house, not the current esthetics and also to know what your priorities are. But those shows don't talk about issues such as heat pumps versus furnaces, or what costs you should plan for in your first year, and so forth.

But this blog is not about real estate, it's about communications

Not knowing what questions to ask is what gets so many projects off track. Say you are launching a blog, and you don't know to ask what you need in a web host, you may end up with a blog that doesn't work.

So before you start any communications project—whether it be launching a website or putting together a social media

campaign—ask someone who’s been there before: “what do I need to know?”

How do you know what questions to ask? Have you ever been in a situation where not asking the right questions made a project or situation go wrong?

Authenticity matters (or, Why Bobby Jindal Won’t Win but Chris Christie Might)

Bobby Jindal just announced (via Facebook) today that he is adding himself to the slew of GOP 2016 presidential hopefuls.

There are lots of reasons why Jindal does not have even a small chance of winning the nomination: Louisiana (the state where he is currently governor) is doing badly, he lacks charisma, and he has made a series of questionable/false/stupid comments recently (Muslim no-go zones, for example).

Currently polling at about one percent, Jindal faces tremendous challenges even getting in to the Fox News GOP candidates debate that will only allow the top ten contenders on stage. It’s pretty clear that Jindal is jockeying for a vice presidential nod, but even that is out of reach for him. Why? **He has a huge authenticity problem.**

Jindal, who was named Piyush by his Indian parents, seems to have rejected his background. He converted to Catholicism and changed his name to Bobby. He has even said he doesn’t consider himself Indian-American, but just American. The

Washington Post explores the question about how Jindal views his past in this article published yesterday: From Piyush to Bobby: How Does Jindal Feel About his Family's Past.

This passage from the article (the bolding is mine) is very telling:

Suresh C. Gupta, a Potomac, Md., doctor, gave a fundraiser for Jindal's first gubernatorial bid. But he said Jindal has actively tried to disassociate himself from the Indian American community in recent years.

*"So what if he's Republican? So what if he's Christian? I don't care about those things," said Gupta, who is a Democrat. **"But you can't forget about your heritage. You can't forget about your roots."***

*When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to the United States last September, a host of politicians attended his rally at Madison Square Garden. Jindal did not. **When Jindal's name was mentioned, he was booed by the crowd.***

It's impossible to say what motivated Jindal to embrace being "American" while at the same time downplaying his roots. Perhaps he is embarrassed by his background or perhaps he thinks people can't relate to an Indian-American. Whatever the reason, it's clear that potential supporters are turned off by his disassociation with his background.

Although the United States is a melting pot, and most immigrants try to assimilate, many still have pride in their heritage. And there are many politicians who embrace hyphenation, from the first Italian-American mayor of New York City Fiorello LaGuardia to former Congressman David Wu (D-OR), the only Chinese-American serving in the House of Representatives from 1999 to 2011.

An even more negative view of Jindal is given in the *Politico Magazine* article by Alan Greenblatt: "The Stupid Party's Candidate: Running to the Right is not Working for Bobby Jindal."

Greenblatt argues that Jindal is pandering to the more conservative base of the Republican Party. He writes:

A governor who reshaped his state by overhauling the education and Medicaid systems now hardly talks substance at all. In fairness, he has released detailed plans on taxes and education, but he routinely spends his time on the stump throwing red meat to the most conservative parts of his party.

He adds:

His pander approach hasn't worked for him. "He is smart, he is policy knowledgeable," says Henry Olsen, a conservative analyst at the Ethics & Public Policy Center, "but rather than build a public persona around his strengths, he has crafted a public persona around other people's strengths."

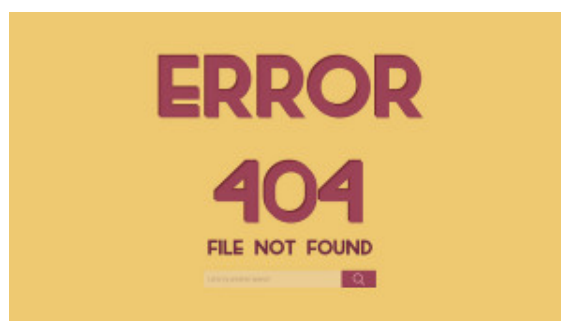
This adds up to an authenticity problem. Who is Bobby Jindal and why does he keep changing his stripes? People respond best to what is authentic and can generally spot a fake. Jindal seems to be working hard to be something he can never be. As long as he's trying to be something he isn't, he will continue to lag behind in the polls.

Authenticity matters, especially when you are trying to persuade.

What do you think? If you were Jindal's communications person, what would you advise?

Is that link broken?

Every Monday, I get a newsletter that compiles events. Yesterday, it listed an event that sounded interesting and when I clicked on the link to learn more, it took me to a 404-error page not found.



By PastaWS on Flickr

Broken links or missing pages are a hassle for your readers. And not only that, search engines punish you for them (by affecting your SEO).

If you are planning an email/newsletter/Tweet/Facebook post/etc.: Check your links before sending or posting. It's that simple. Just click on them and make sure they are taking you to the right place. It may be an extra few minutes of your time, but it will make your readers happy and make you look competent.

If you want to make sure there are no broken links on your website, there are many tools that can help you (search for broken link checker). Here's a compilation, specific for WordPress sites:

5 Tools to Check for Broken Links

Once you've found broken links on your website, you will want to fix them.

Web Marketing: How to Deal with Broken Links

Make sure to put some time and effort into avoiding sending people to non-existent website pages. It will help maintain your readers' trust and your standing with the search engines.

If you come across a broken link, what do you do?

Can you rehab your image by deleting offensive posts?

Here's the story:

Yesterday, Grammarly (a site that promises to be your best grammar check resource), posted an article titled "5 authors who died old maids" to Facebook (unfortunately, I was not quick-thinking enough to take a screen shot). The post was about great female writers such as Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson.

I did a double take when I saw that on my timeline. Old maids? What year is this? Who calls unmarried women "old maids?" I commented on the Facebook post that it was sexist and ageist to use the term, and that Grammarly should rename the post. Many others had similar comments and sentiments. Some (minority) thought using the term was perfectly OK and that the

rest of use were too easily offended.

Then, I went to Twitter where I posted this:



I remind you that Grammarly is a site that claims it offers a “better way to write.”

No response from Grammarly on Twitter or on Facebook. No comment whatsoever. But this morning, the post is gone from Facebook and from the Grammarly blog without any type of acknowledgement.

It seems that Grammarly understood that using the term was offensive enough to some, or at least, controversial enough, to remove the post. They have erased it from Grammarly post history. But Grammarly has not admitted anything explicitly. It ignored tweets and Facebook comments.

Is ignoring comments a wise move?

And just this past weekend, in the *Washington Post Magazine*, humor columnist Gene Weingarten had this to say about Grammarly:

In short, as a sleuth, Grammarly is top-notch. As an editor, however, it is of the prissy, arbitrary, rule-besotted sort whom good writers want to kill. Under the circumstances, I

would do it slow and ugly, like what Dave the astronaut did to HAL.

Perhaps not super humorous, but definitely worth it to read the whole piece.

Grammarly can't erase Weingarten's piece as easily as it can erase it's own mistakes.

Now, is Grammarly in crisis, even of the fleeting social media kind? No, of course not. But in my book at least, it has a damaged image. Between Weingarten's criticism and Grammarly's uncaring attitude, not to mention the fact that a sexist term got through the supposed strict usage checker folks, I am not keen to promote or use the service. And no amount of erasing posts (would this also be called white-washing? I am not sure) and ignoring comments is going to fix that.

What would you recommend that Grammarly do, if anything? Oh, and had you even heard of Grammarly before or am I doing it a public relations favor by mentioning it?

One type of headline will always fail

You're invited

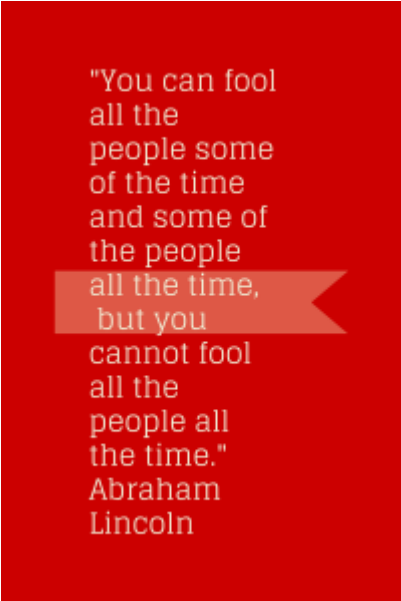
That was the subject line for an email I got recently from Boston University. Naturally, I assumed that I was been invited to attend an event. But no, I was being invited to donate money to the annual pledge drive.

This was a classic bait-and-switch.

The following week I got an email from BU that said something about women (fewer/more women getting degrees, I can't recall). Again, I opened it since I thought it would be an article about gender disparity. It wasn't. It was another bait-and-switch. Again, BU wanted me to be among the women who donate to the university.

Bait-and-switch headlines/subject lines are trust-killers.

I understand there's clutter and that you need to work hard to entice readers. Using a bait-and-switch can guarantee people will open your email or read your article, but at a cost. When you fool people this way (and that is what you are doing), you ensure they will no longer trust your content.



"You can fool
all the
people some
of the time
and some of
the people
all the time,
but you
cannot fool
all the
people all
the time."
Abraham
Lincoln

What's going to happen when BU really wants to invite me to an event? What type of subject line will they use? I am not going to believe "you're invited" again.

Writing a subject line/headline is not easy. You want to entice readers to open your email or read your article. You are much better off describing what you are offering inside than using a false premise.

What is your experience with bait-and-switch headlines or subject lines? If you use them, how well do they work for you?