What's the goal behind the AMADC's $45 happy hour?

Note: AMADC is the Washington, DC chapter of the American Marketing Association (AMA) , which is a membership organization with chapters around the country. I am not a member of the AMA or AMADC, although I have attended its events in the past.

Last Friday, the AMADC tweeted about its upcoming happy hour (or AMA Networking Events as they call them) at a DC restaurant. I clicked on the link and found out that to attend the happy hour, non-members must pay $45 while members can attend free. According to what I saw, the happy hour/networking event is a chance to mingle with other people. This is a description from the AMADC website:

> *AMADC Networking Events are the place to get dialed into the DC marketing community. Make alliances for your business, find your next great employee, get active in the AMA, get career advice or maybe get your next job. Be sure to bring a ton of business cards, you are going to need them*

There is no program, no speaker and at least from what I can see, no food or drink included in the price of admission. Just a chance to meet people (maybe).

Here's my conversation with AMADC on Twitter:

According to the @AMADC response above, the free happy hour for members is a "main benefit of membership." This however, is not even mentioned in the AMADC's website membership benefits page.

(Annual membership in AMADC is $285, of which $220 is for

national dues and $65 for chapter dues.)

So, what is the marketing/strategic goal for the AMADC happy hours? Is the goal to reach non-members and show them value?

Are these happy hours simply membership perks? If so, fine. If I am understanding this correctly, members get to feel as though they are "saving" $45 for each "networking event.

Here's a question though: members don't have to pay extra to attend. And while this may be a benefit of membership, <u>just how valuable is it?</u> *Remember cost is not equivalent to value.*

But, if these happy hours/networking events are also a chance to reach out to non-members and perhaps even to recruit new members, then charging $45 is not accomplishing that goal. I can tell you that from experience, specifically with the AMADC.

When I first moved to DC nearly ten years ago, I attended one of the AMADC happy hours at a bar downtown. The cost then was $25 (why the nearly 100% increase is another question). I got to the bar, where I knew nobody. There was a section reserved for the AMA (right off the main bar, and not even clearly marked off). They offered no snacks, or drinks (or even discount drinks other than the regular happy hour stuff). There were no name tags. Nobody offered to act as an AMA ambassador and welcome people. I tried talking to a couple of people but having a conversation over the bar's loud background noise was near impossible. In short, it was a waste of time and money. I could've just gone to the bar on my own, ordered a beer, sat right next to the AMA DC section, and gotten as much out of it while saving $25.

Is the AMADC's goal to be in line with other organizations in town?

Meanwhile, the other membership organizations in town also host monthly happy hours, however, this charge of $45 for a

happy hour is the highest I have seen. For example, IABCDC does not charge for its happy hours. Everyone pays for what they consume. Various communications meetups such as DC PR Flacks don't charge either. The PRSA-NCC charges everyone for its PRO Net happy hours ($10 for members and $15 for non-members) but the fee includes a free drink and appetizers.

Is the goal to encourage networking among members?

Other organizations charge between $35 and $65 for non-members to attend chapter meetings, professional development events or luncheons/dinners. In fact, AMADC charges $50 to non-members and $30 for members for its professional development events. Bear in mind that at a professional development event or at a meal, people are getting a tangible benefit.

Why would networking be considered a more important benefit than professional development? Why not make professional development the perk of membership?

Is the AMADC's goal to make money off networking events?

Obviously, when there is a cost involved for the organization (the meal, the room rental, etc.), there is a reason to charge both members and non-members. Many organizations use sponsorships to defray the overhead costs, and so that they can offer discounts to their members. For the upcoming AMADC happy hour, a local organization is sponsoring the event. Since people have to pay for their drinks and food, there is no cost to the AMADC other than a room rental or guarantee fee, which I assume is being covered by the sponsorship. The non-member fee would seem to be a money-maker.

Is the goal to show non-members what they would save?

Perhaps the AMADC is imagining a scenario where a non-member signs up for this event, has a wonderful time and makes a lot of new contacts, and figures that if he or she signs up for membership, he/she could go to this events "for free" thus

"saving" $45.

So what are the AMADC's goals?

I don't know and I can't tell what the AMADC's goals are. It's not clear to me what it is aiming to accomplish by charging so much for a happy hour. In my opinion, there is little value to a happy hour and very little reason to spend $45 to attend one. Yes, I understand there is a networking opportunity. But as mentioned above, there are many other free and lower cost opportunities in town. Plus, going to a happy hour at a loud bar is not necessarily the best way to network.

What do you think? Would you pay this fee? Why or why not?

Angry and posting? What you should do instead.

In this age of social media, we always have an outlet for our thoughts, whether they be insightful and informative, or whether to express our frustrations and complaints.

If we want to share golden nugget from a conference, there's Twitter and a hashtag. If we want to lash out at our boss, there's Facebook (where we aren't friends with our boss). If we want to rant (or rave) about anything, we can post about it at length on our blog.

Most of the time, there's no harm done. Except if you post when you are angry.

When you are angry, you are caught up in the (negative)

emotion of the moment. You are looking either to vent your frustration or to exact some sort of revenge. When you vent in anger in person (and not on social media), there are often (immediate) consequences. You may insult or offend someone and ruin your relationship with that person. You may escalate a situation (and in some cases, this can even lead to violence). Or you may blow off steam, and calm down.

But when you are angry and you post on social media, the consequences can be greater and more long-lasting. Social media is the great amplifier. Your angry thoughts can go viral. And even more so, they became permanent. They can't be easily retracted. They are searchable and they can definitely be attributed to you.

We've seen case upon case of people tweeting in anger (whether justified or not), and then facing consequences. There have been a few cases of passengers getting booted off a flight. Or people being fired for tweeting something.

Here's the thing: Anger does not allow you to think clearly. You may not see the consequences.

Angry and about to post? Take a pause. Put your thought into a draft. Wait.

A few weeks ago, I had an unfortunate meeting with someone and I felt very angry and upset afterward. I came home and wrote a blog post, which would have upset that person had I published it. Instead, I wrote it and let it sit in the draft file. I still haven't published it. My anger is gone, and now I realize I don't necessarily want to have those thoughts, about a specific person and meeting to be "on the record." Perhaps what happened was not as bad as I perceived it. Perhaps this person meant no harm.

If you must vent, write it but don't tweet it. As a speaker at an event a couple of years ago said (I wish I could remember her name):

Never Twitter when you're bitter.

So, write it. But don't post it…yet. Come back to it when you are not as angry and frustrated.

Once you are calm, and revisiting your post ask yourself these questions:

- Do you really want to put it on the record?
- Is this important enough to ruffle feathers?
- What do you expect to gain from this?
- And, is it worth it?

Have you regretted posting something you wrote while you were angry? What were the consequences?

Are you communicating with everybody, somebody, or nobody?

A couple of weeks ago I was at Ronald Reagan National Airport waiting for a flight to Miami. I was checking my email, Twitter, etc. on my phone, when the woman next to me asked me in Spanish if the flight was about to leave. Luckily (for her) I speak Spanish, and I told her that no, not yet. I pointed at the podium, which was empty, and explained that the plane was not yet in and that when we got ready to board, there would be someone there making announcements.

She told me she was headed to Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic). She showed me her boarding pass, and I pointed out her seat number and her group number, explaining she needed to

wait for her group number to be called. Unfortunately, she spoke no English. None. I asked her if she had ever traveled before. She hadn't.

Here she was, about to embark on an international flight, and she had not the faintest idea of what was going on or how to navigate the boarding process, which most of us take for granted. In Miami, she would be OK, since the announcements are made in both English and Spanish, but in Washington, the announcements are all in English. If I hadn't been sitting there (and been a Spanish speaker), I am not sure how she would have figured it out.

Which brings me to a marketing question: who do you communicate to?

Everybody?

You can't communicate with everybody, obviously. There are too many variables. There's language obviously, and then there's level of knowledge. Do you assume that your audience knows certain things or do you explain everything thoroughly?

Some?

Chances are, most communicators are aiming to reach only some of the total audience. This is called the target audience. Communications are tailored for the representative member of the target audience. So, in the DCA example of above, the gate agent speaks in English only because most of his audience speaks English.

Nobody?

If nobody understands your message, then your communications are in serious trouble. You are making strategic and tactical mistakes. It has happened at the Miami airport, on flights to Spanish-speaking countries, the gate agents don't speak a bit of Spanish (and if they do, heavy accents and bad translating

make it virtually impossible to understand). Very few people understand and everybody is confused.

When making communication decisions, you must consider your target audience (and then some). You will choose language, complexity of message, and what will resonate based on how you can reach the majority of your target. You will not communicate with everybody. But if you are communicating with nobody, then you have a problem.

Thoughts?

You won't know until you try

My nieces are a bit fussy when it comes to food. They don't really want to try foods they haven't had before. I once made a pasta dish, and my four-year old niece looked at it with absolute horror. I told her she had to try it, and if she didn't like it, she didn't have to finish eating it. She tried it and she didn't like it (it had spinach in it, and she is not a fan since as she put it "I don't like the green stuff").

Sometimes you just don't know until you try, yet we seem to work hard to avoid finding out for ourselves. If we are researching hotels, we read reviews on travel advice sites. If we are looking for a service professional, we check out ratings. We ask around. We want information before we make a decision.

Just today, I noticed what someone posted in a networking group in which I belong. She wanted to know about people's experiences with the group because she was considering

joining. In my opinion, networking is personal. You will have your own experiences and it is always worth it to attend a meeting or two to get a sense of the people and if it is a right fit for you. What others feel is almost completely irrelevant.

You just have to try it for yourself. Word of mouth and reviews can provide insight, but ultimately, what matters is how your experience goes.

The experience counts more

Several weeks ago, I asked my Facebook friends if they had any handymen recommendations. My long-time handyman had retired due to injury and I needed someone to do a few things around the house. A friend passed on the name of someone who had done some work in his house. I contacted the handyman. He asked me to send him an email detailing what I needed done. He didn't respond. I called again. He assured me he would respond. He didn't. I called again. He was on vacation. Normally, I would have never contacted him again, but because he was recommended I did.

Finally, about three months after my initial contact, the handyman came to give me an estimate for the work. It seemed quite high but I scheduled the work since by this time I was desperate to get it done. The handyman sent two of his guys to do the work. They were nice enough but not highly skilled. They did not even have a tool kit with them (I had to give them a screwdriver!). They finished doing the work. The main handyman stuck with his original estimate. I questioned it and I ended up paying almost $200 less than he estimated (the work took one and a half hours and he had estimated five). I tried working with this handyman based on a trusted friend's recommendation but the actual experience of working with him was not to my liking. I will not hire him again.

The marketing dilemma

Many marketers spend time on getting positive reviews and referrals, and those can stimulate people to try a product or service. But ultimately, the customer/client experience is what counts. People will stick with something and recommend it only if the experience itself is good.

The dilemma for many marketers is that many times we are hired to stimulate interest, but have no control over the user experience. If a company has hired many marketers to try and drum up interest for a product or service, chances are it is not the marketing that is lacking. It may well be that the product or service is not living up to the marketing.

What are your experiences with this? How does can marketing be better tied to user experience?

Is hurry killing reading comprehension?

In his Sunday *Washington Post* article "What writing 30,000 posts taught this financial planner," Barry Ritholtz, author of the On Investing column, says that not only are many readers choosing to believe what they want to believe, but that their reading comprehension is abysmal. He writes:

> **Reading comprehension is terrible.** *I am astonished how many people lack the basic reading comprehension skills to understand a 500-word essay. I give every piece a second edit to figure out how lazy and biased readers are going misinterpret, misunderstand and just plain old miss the point of the post.*

(Note: This is part of the last paragraph of his article that appeared in the printed edition of the *Washington Post*, but which is mysteriously missing from the online version of the article.)

This is sad and disturbing. Those of us who make our living from writing, depend on readers to understand what we say. If readers can't understand our ideas, then how are we going to make sure to get our point across? What is the point of writing? It doesn't matter how talented we are, if the readers don't get it, then it is not worth anything.

What is behind this lack of reading comprehension? Is it that people are not being taught how to read well in school? Is it that people are stupid? Is it that writing has to be "dumbed down"? There's probably some element of all of these, but one bigger problem is that people are in a hurry. They are not taking the time to read closely.

We hear over and over how people are so busy. People are multi-tasking. People are frazzled. One consequence of this continual rush is that people are not paying attention to what they are reading.

How many times have you posted something or written an email including details about an upcoming event and the recipient will ask you for the exact information you have already provided. It happens to me all the time.

Case in point: I wrote a short email to a friend telling her that I had missed seeing her at our book group and that I really didn't like the book. She wrote back telling me that she has had some family issues and hadn't finished reading the book, and she also wanted to know what I thought of the book. Now, my email was five sentences long. One of those sentences was about my opinion the book. She clearly did not absorb what I wrote. Either she was preoccupied or in a hurry or both.

It seems people are no longer able to read closely. They skim

through the information. In fact, when I teach my blogging workshop, I tell my participants that content should be scannable, since this is what people do when they read on the web.

This loss of reading comprehension concerns me. It makes me wonder how anybody is going to learn anything new, let alone anything complex. If we are promoting new products or ideas, this is going to be a huge obstacle to overcome.

What do you think? Have you noticed that you have to over-simplify ideas? Have you noticed that people just don't seem to pay attention?

Is self-censorship the answer?

Have you ever regretted saying something on social media? Or has something you posted on social media come back to haunt you "in real life?" Do you wish you could say what you really think but fear the consequences?

Social media seems to occupy a unique position of being virtual yet connecting real people in real relationships. We can broadcast our thoughts instantly, to thousands (or millions) of people around the world, while still having to be careful about the relationships we have in real life (IRL) with some of our connections.

Is everybody in your Facebook world your friend or family member? Chances are you have a fair number of other

relationships on Facebook—co-workers, professional acquaintances, people you knew in high school/college, people you met on Twitter, and so on. Do you want to share everything with everybody or do you wish you could pick and choose? If you don't want to share something with a certain person in your Facebook, why are you "friends" with him or her?

Sometimes, you see people in real life (at professional events, etc.) and feel forced to maintain a "Facebook friendship." Unfriending on Facebook is a strange phenomenon, especially since most people use it to communicate that they no longer consider you to be in their social circle (although some people think of unfriending as simply reducing the number of people that they need to read feeds from).

Not a friend, just an acquaintance

But wait, Facebook has an answer! You can designate people as "acquaintances" and then when you post you can choose to share with "friends, except acquaintances." I just learned about this feature (and I am not sure how long it's been around). Clearly, many people are trying to separate close friends from acquaintances while becoming "Facebook friends" with anybody that asks.

But what about friends/acquaintances who say annoying things?

Facebook has had a "hide" feature for years. Twitter recently created a way to maintain ties with people you don't want to hear from. It's the mute button. Now, you can simply mute people you don't really care for while still following them.

So can I say what I think?

And then there is what we say or don't say. Should we say what we really think or should we be more politic? There was a recent poll that found people are not expressing their opinions freely on social media any more. I can see why. We

don't want to offend and more importantly, we don't want to be attacked. There are many "trolls," that is people in social media who make it their business to be on the attack. They actively seek confrontation and are often very nasty. Or there are those people who are always arguing with you on Facebook or Twitter. If you say white, they will say black. Does every opinion need a counter-opinion?

Is self-censorship the answer to all these social media conundrums?

I think that at times you should follow the adage that if you have nothing good to say, don't say it. For example, if someone posts a picture of his/her baby, and you don't think the child is terribly cute, do you share your thoughts? Probably very wise to keep that opinion to yourself.

Social media seems to have made it difficult for people to understand that their words have real consequences. That you can insult and offend virtually. People routinely express their negative opinions. They don't like the restaurant you recently went to (and raved about), so they share their thoughts saying that it was disgusting, the food was gross, they got sick (you get the picture). They disagree with an article you shared, they tell you how stupid the author is, how ridiculous anybody is for having that opinion. And on and on.

There is no one correct way to do social media. Some people will always be offended and some people won't care. To some, social media is a place to cultivate relationships and to some, it is just a place to promote their product or business.

I think it is always best to think about what you are going to say before you say it: Is it necessary? Does it add value to the conversation? Is it something you care about deeply? Will it make a difference? Will it hurt the other person? Does it really matter?

Perhaps it is not self-censorship we need as much as a **pause and think moment.** Too bad there isn't a built-in feature for that on Twitter and Facebook.

Adding insult

It seems that there is a new breed of call-to-action/pop-up ad that is seeking to shame you into an action and insult you if you choose not to take that action. I am not sure if it's a trend, or there's one provider that everyone is using for these, but lately I have seen them on several different organizational blogs.

What is happening is that you will attempt to go to a blog post and before you can read the post, a large pop-up appears. The pop-up will usually be asking you subscribe to a newsletter and will be forcing you to choose between two options (one to favor the action and the other to *oppose* it), since there is no way to close the pop-up otherwise.

The yes option will be intensely positive. It will say something like this: Yes, sign me up for your newsletter since I care about the Earth and will do my utmost to help keep it clean. *

The no option will be oppositional. It will say something like this: No, I don't care about the Earth at all. I won't lift a finger to help keep it clean.*

These are made-up examples but they mirror what I have been seeing on blogs and websites for various organizations.

More traditional calls to action will provide two options that are more subdued and straightforward, something like "Yes, I'd like to (subscribe, vote, etc.)" and "No thanks."

Obviously, just because you don't want to sign-up for a newsletter does not mean you do not care about the subject. Perhaps you don't want another newsletter. Perhaps you want to read the blog post before you make a decision. But yet you are being asked, by clicking on that negative option, to affirm that you believe or support that very negative sentence.

This a trend that should disappear and quick. **Insulting and shaming people to support your cause, even if it is a great cause, is a form of bullying**. Bullying your readers is never a good idea.

Have you seen these? What are your thoughts?

Improve your blogging! Come to the How to Write Your Blog workshop next week, on September 18, in Washington, DC. More details and registration here: https://howtowriteyourblog918.eventbrite. com

You need both form and

function

One of the houses in my neighborhood has recently gone up for sale. I presume it did anyway because this is the sign that went up in front of the house:

We've all seen for sale signs in front of homes. They generally look like this:

"Boost the Market Value of Your Home" by Dan Moyle on Flickr

Notice anything different between these signs?

It seems that this is a case where a company is so anxious to have their format look different than the competition that it forgets about the function.

You can barely make out the telephone number and website of

the realtor in the sign at the top. In fact, you'd probably have to drive right up to the sign (and perhaps that is the intent). Also, the sign at the top does not have the words "for sale" anywhere on it. Someone passing by does not know if the house has already been sold or if it is for rent.

So the next time you are itching to change your graphic identity, remember that you need both form and function. **If you don't consider what the piece is for, and how people will interact with it, you won't be doing a good job of communicating.**

What do you think? Does having a real estate sign that looks markedly different than others make your home stand out?

Summer challenge #8 (final!): Take a (social media) break

Here we are, in the last week of August, and Labor Day is upon us. This means that summer is "officially" over, and so is the summer challenge series.

There's been a lot of chatter over the past couple of months about social media being addictive. Huffington Post UK has an article that states that quitting Facebook and Twitter is harder to do than quitting smoking!

CBS News, in the article "How real a risk is social media addiction," shares that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has defined a "Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD)." The article states:

  Symptoms for Internet addiction can be similar to addiction

to anything else, and fall into two types of behaviors: an ever increasing need to engage with the object of the addiction, and a bad feeling when not getting enough of it.

I feel that I check Facebook and Twitter way too often. Is it bad? Here are 10 Signs It's Time to Take a Break from your Social Media Self. Do any of those ring true to you? In my case, I think Twitter definitely impacts my productivity.

My final summer challenge to you is to take a break from social media. I don't mean quit it completely, but just take a few days off and see how you fare. With a three-day weekend ahead, now is the perfect time to do it. Why take time to be on social media when you can be social in real life?

Forbes has a helpful article (Need a Break from Social Media?) that concludes that taking a break from social media can help your productivity and impact in the long run, and even provides three steps for how to do it.

I am pledging right now to be off Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn for all of the Labor Day Weekend. If you see me post, get on my case! Will you join me?

Have a fantastic Labor Day Weekend, and make the most of the last few days of "official" summer!

It's back! How to write your

blog workshop on September 18

It's back and entering its third year! The **How to Write Your Blog: A Hands-on Workshop** will take place in Washington, DC on September 18, 2014, from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm.

If you've been struggling to get your blog going or your current blog is gathering dust, this workshop is for you.

You will learn:

- Elements to include in every blog post
- How to find blog post ideas
- Types of blog posts you can write
- How to make your blog work for your organization
- What to include and what to avoid on your blog
- How to write attention-grabbing headlines

Through exercises and discussion, we will come up with a direction for your blog and help you to write great blog posts.

Register by September 11 to get the early bird price of $85.

Get more details and register at: https://howtowriteyourblog918.eventbrite.com