

# Make it a challenging summer!

In the marketing communications world, it seems like summer is a quiet time of the year. People are on vacation. Summer Fridays are in force. This makes it a great time of the year to take on a few challenges.

I think summer is a good time to shake things up. On a personal level, you may have certain goals for the next couple of months. Maybe, like me, you want to spend as much time outdoors as possible. Maybe you want to learn a new skill. Maybe you just want to have fun.

How about making it a challenging summer?



Obstacle 14 from the West Point, The US Military Academy Flickr stream Photo by Tommy Gilligan

For the next **eight weeks**, I'll be issuing a weekly challenge to do with your writing, social media and blogging. Although there will be no scoring and no prizes (sorry), it's a way to shake things up and to make things better while you watch the thermometer hit 90 degrees and higher.

The first challenge will be posted tomorrow. To participate, simply read the post. Your comments are welcome here on the blog or you can post on Twitter using the hashtag

#summerchallenge.

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# Happy Independence Day!

To readers in the United States, I wish you a very happy Fourth of July! However you celebrate, I hope you have an enjoyable holiday.

I'll be back next week to share some caffeinated views and to issue a challenge. Stay tuned!

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## 5 guaranteed ways to increase your website's bounce rate

Here are five guaranteed ways to increase the bounce rate on your website:

1. **Use a small font.** Or use a weird small font. Basically, make it hard for those of us forty-plus to read your content.
2. **Clutter, clutter everywhere.** Cram it full of stuff to make it seem like a contender for an episode of TV's Hoarders. Make it so busy I don't know where to look first. Or whether to look at all.

3. **Make the video (or audio) play automatically.** Bonus points if it is really loud.

4. **Make it hard to figure what you do, who you are or where you are located.** If you want to be even more obtuse, make sure to use excessive and meaningless jargon.

5. **Spelling and grammar mistakes galore mixed in with typos.** Certainly, don't bother proofreading.

Yes, the five ways to increase your bounce rate are the five ways to turn off potential website visitors. It's not good, and I have experienced all of them on websites recently.



Bouncing Ball by Dave  
Murphy on Flickr

Do you know what the bounce rate on your website is? I don't mean the term (just in case, Google Analytics defines it as the percentage of single-page sessions, where the user enters your site but does not interact or stay on your site), but the actual number.

If you don't know it, I suggest checking your Analytics right now. Basically, the higher the number, the worse your bounce rate. A high bounce rate indicates that people are just not interested in your website, which in turn indicates that you have a problem.

In reality, you want to lower your bounce rate. You want to

have the visitors to your website stay and not bounce off. Notice that the bounce rate does not have to do with the number of visitors that land on your site, but rather the number that stays. So, if you have thousands of visitors, with a 95 percent bounce rate you are doing much worse than a site with a few dozen visitors and 65 percent bounce rate.

What makes you want to stay on the websites you visit? What makes you run away as fast as you can click that x on the browser tab?

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# **The namaste guide to smart marketing**

## **Namaste.**

"The light in me honors the light in you." That's what *namaste* means in Sanskrit. It's a beautiful greeting that is often used at the end of a yoga class (or sometimes at the beginning).

Good yoga teachers honor their students. They respect their limitations and seek to teach them to work with their bodies. What does this have to do with marketing? It's simple. Like yoga teachers, good marketers honor their customers by getting to know them and understanding their needs and then

customizing messages (and media) for the customers.

You should know that I have practiced yoga for more than ten years, and have been to many studios and had many teachers. I've been taking a break for the past couple years, but yesterday, I attended my first class in a long time at a new-to-me studio.

### **Not-so-good yoga teacher (no knowledge of students)**

The teacher walked in to the studio and although she smiled and said hello to me, she did not introduce herself or ask me my name or more importantly, any questions regarding my knowledge of yoga. She also did not ask the class as a whole if there were any injuries or issues she should be aware of. She started the class (late but that is another story) and pretty much assumed everybody understood everything, to the point she was using the Sanskrit terms for many of the poses. As I mentioned, it's been a while, and I did not recall the difference between *utrasana* (standing forward bend) and *utkatasana* (chair pose). Everybody seemed to be following, but I could not help but think a real beginner would be completely lost. And forget somebody with injuries although she did offer a few modifications (if your knee hurts, don't do this).

### **Much better yoga teacher (customizes teachings to students' needs)**

Contrast her disinterest with another teacher I had at another studio. He wanted to know how much yoga I had practiced and if I had any physical limitations. I told him that my knee had been bothering me and he made a point of explaining what I could do differently and how to protect myself from injury or further pain. **He tailored his teaching to my needs.** Instead of telling me not to do something because it hurt, he offered alternative poses or different ways of

doing the pose. He took into account the levels of knowledge in the class. It was very clear he wanted to teach yoga to people while honoring their bodies and their limitations (there is actually a Sanskrit term for this – *ahimsa*– to not injure).

Good yoga teachers work to understand students' limitations and then offer modifications. Good yoga teachers do not push students to do something that is not within their level of practice. Good yoga teachers practice namaste –honoring others–by understanding those others.

## **Knowledge + customization = smart marketing**

Smart marketers work hard to understand their customers. They know who and where their customers are and what they want and need. Then, with this knowledge, they tailor their marketing messages to the customer's needs.

Think about the last spam email you got. Perhaps you got an email about a “miracle” diet pill or getting listed in a mythical directory. You probably deleted those emails right away because those messages were not tailored to you. Spam marketers are not smart marketers. They are mass marketers. They send the same message to everyone and hope something sticks.

Honor your customers. Provide messages and offers that make sense for them.

Namaste.

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# Is the chamber of commerce model still viable?

As I mentioned in the last post, I am not a member of my local chamber of commerce, and never have been. I am not alone. According to reporting in the Washington Business Journal (which I can't link to here because it is behind a paywall), membership is dwindling at the chambers of commerce in the Washington metro region.

Almost all of the DC metro local chambers have experienced a drop in members over the past ten years. The D.C. Chamber lost 15.7%, Montgomery County lost 17.8% and Fairfax lost a jaw-dropping 54.9%. However, the chambers haven't experienced a drop in revenue, since they have increased dues and other income-generating programs.

One of the reasons I haven't joined a chamber is because it is expensive and I feel there is little benefit. After all, there are plenty lower-cost to no-cost alternatives for networking purposes, not the least of is on social media. The other reason is that I find most chambers attract small businesses that may not have the budget for the marketing services I provide.

I would guess that the ease of using Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook to connect with folks, and then maintain the relationship is behind the remarkable drop in membership for the chambers. Why pay dues when you can easily network with people who share your interests or whom fit other parameters like work in a certain industry, live in a geographic area and others.

Perhaps the chamber model is no longer suited to our Internet-

driven world. We no longer need the chamber membership guides to find people or services. We can look up services on any number of sites, like Yelp, which may even have ratings. We certainly don't need chamber networking events to meet people in person. One remarkable and low cost alternative is Meet Up. Meet Up hosts many groups of local people who share an interest, which can be as narrowly or as broadly focused as you like.

Do you think chambers of commerce will survive another ten years? I'd like to know if you are a member of chamber of commerce. Why or why not? Please tell me in the comments.

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## How to make a bad impression

In the past few weeks, I have been flat-out amazed at how some people act in business/networking situations. They've not made a good impression.

Here's how you too can make a bad impression:

1. **Have a limp handshake (bonus points if clammy and sweaty too).** The other day I met the director of a local chamber of commerce. She introduced herself and gave me the limpest handshake I can remember. I wanted to say to her that she needed to work on a firm handshake, instead, I shuddered inwardly. Limp handshakes communicate lack of conviction and being tentative. And also, yuck.

2. **Don't introduce yourself.** I was at a small lunch gathering and a guy joined us late. He sat down and didn't bother to say his name or what his business was. I didn't find out until the end when he gave me his business card. Very few people require no introduction and generally, they don't go to small business

gatherings. To me, not introducing yourself shows you are not aware of other people.

3. **Be late.** At the same lunch gathering mentioned above, where I was a first-timer, the organizer showed up more than 15 minutes late. Being late for a meeting you organized is inexcusable. Being late in general just shows a disregard for others.

4. **Don't respond.** Say we met at an event, and we exchange business cards, and we talk about having coffee soon, and then I send you an email (and then another) and I don't hear back from you. Yeah. I get it. You don't want to have coffee. That's OK, but if in the future you change your mind, you've left me with a really bad impression. (This one also applies to social media. Check your @ replies on Twitter. Is someone asking you a question? Perhaps you should answer it).

5. **Attack the other person.** The other day I met a business owner who is a big fan of the chamber of commerce. I am not since I don't usually find my target audience there. When she asked me if I was a member of her chamber, I explained why I am not. She got defensive and immediately began attacking me. She wasn't polite or constructive. She was just mean and putting me down.

Here's a few more:

- Be disinterested in other people or the topic being discussed.
- Dress inappropriately.
- Be dismissive.
- Don't pay attention and then ask a question that has already been answered.
- Be negative.
- Interrupt. Repeatedly.
- Tell inappropriate (racist, sexist, etc.) jokes or stories. (Oh, it happens. All the time.)

Some people will only try to make a good impression with people they are trying to impress and ignore everyone else. That's a guaranteed way to make a really bad impression (most everyone despises a brown-noser).

If you don't care about how you come across, then you should also not be surprised if you are not doing well in your business. Impressions matter. You only have one chance to make a good first impression, but you have multiple chances to make a bad impression.

Have you dealt with these behaviors? What would you add?

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## **Where were you when Feedly went down?**

Last week, for three days in a row, Feedly was targeted by hackers looking for ransom in a huge DDoS (distributed denial of service) attack. It meant that nobody was able to access Feedly.

If you use Feedly as your RSS reader, it meant that there was no way of accessing all your feeds short of going to each source. We set up RSS readers precisely to avoid having to visit dozens of separate websites and blogs. Feedly being down was definitely an inconvenience (not on the magnitude of Twitter being down, but still).

If you are a blog publisher, and you use RSS as your primary distribution channel, you were really screwed last week. Nobody saw your feed. Few people if any took the time to visit

your site to read your latest posts. If they did, it's too bad you can't identify them, because they are your most loyal supporters.

**There's a big lesson here for bloggers: you must use various different channels to push out your content.**

**On social:** You have to share on all of your social networks. If you don't regularly post your latest stuff to LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, etc., you must start.

**On email:** Perhaps this is a good time to check out newsletter providers that have the RSS-to-email feature. This feature takes your latest posts and sends them out as a newsletter to your contacts on whatever schedule you choose. You definitely want to make sure people can subscribe to your feed directly too.

**In person:** Do your friends and colleagues know about your blog? Let them know and encourage them to visit. If you give out business cards, is your blog listed?

I can almost promise you that this won't be the last time Feedly will be down. Chances are also good that one of the social networks will be attacked too. There's little you can do to avoid internet failures, but there's a lot you can do to avoid depending on just one channel of communication.

Where were you (and what did you do) when Feedly went down last week?

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**Yes, blogging helps you get**

# found

A couple of days ago I wrote a post called Is Blogging Dead? My answer is no, emphatically, blogging is not dead. My chief reason for believing this is that blogging helps you get found.

However, sometimes you get found for the wrong reason.

In the past week alone, two women have contacted me looking for help locating discontinued Clinique eye shadows. Why? Because three (!) years ago I wrote a post about my poor experience with Clinique's Gone but Not Forgotten program. If you read the post, you may be able to tell it is a critique. If you read my About page or any other part of this website, I think it is fairly obvious that I am not associated with Clinique in any way. Yet these women somehow think I can help them, not just to find information about Clinique's program, but to actually find the eye shadows for them.

That post is one of the most visited on this blog and it has nothing to do with what I do. Perhaps I should delete it because it is clearly bringing the wrong kind of people to this blog. At the same time it illustrates the power of blogging and specifically, of tagging and keywords. I know people find the post by keying in "gone but not forgotten."

The main lessons here are two:

1. Blogging, and using descriptive keywords and tags, will certainly help you get found.
2. What you blog about (and the keywords, tags, etc. you use) should help you be found for what you want to be found.

Sadly, a third lesson is that many people out there do not bother to read things closely or have poor reading comprehension.

Have you had a similar experience? And, should I take that post down?

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## Is blogging dead?

This past Saturday, I attended WordCamp Philly. There were four tracks: User, Power User, Designer and Developer. With sessions in the User/Power User tracks such as “BuddyPress: An Enterprise Solution” and “How I Spent the Last 5 years playing with WordPress and building PewResearch.org” you can tell something is up. It’s not really new, but more and more organizations, from nonprofits to multinationals like Coca-Cola, are using WordPress not as a blogging platform, but as a Content Management System (CMS).



W for WordPress Philly  
Pretzels

A few weeks ago, a well known social media marketing guy posted on Twitter that the effort involved in blogging was too large in relation to the return on investment (ROI).

Many organizations have BINOs: blogs in name only. They don’t update them frequently or haven’t even posted in the last couple of years.

So is blogging dead? Should you give up your blog and just use WordPress to be your website platform?

**No!!!!**

**Blogging is not dead.** Blogging still provides many many benefits, not the least of which is making it easier for people to find your organization when they don't even know it exists.

How many people don't know Coca-Cola? Coke doesn't have to do much to be known. But a small organization that works on historical restoration or a business that helps people in a specific area get organized has to work a lot harder. Small businesses or nonprofits have to provide information that their potential customers or supporters need and want. One of the best ways to provide a constant stream of information is blogging.

Call it content marketing if you must, but blogs are an easy and flexible way to provide opinions, analysis, information, graphics or even podcasts to your audience.

Blogs are social. Blogs let your audience share content easily. And blogs are a way to interact with your audience through the comments. And you can extend your blog's reach by enlisting guest bloggers.

Even though WordPress is a powerful CMS and even though **consistent, quality** blogging does take a lot of effort, blogging is still worthwhile.

Are you still blogging? If you have given up, please tell me why in the comments. If you have seen value, give me an example.

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# The best way not to get business

Friends, I got a spam email today that just has to be read to be believed. Here it is in its entirety, my comments below:

Dear business owner of [deborahbrody.com](http://deborahbrody.com)

Your [deborahbrody.com](http://deborahbrody.com) business is losing THOUSANDS of DOLLARS every year, maybe more!

Why? How?

Your credit card processor HIDES THEIR FEES. Don't believe it? Check your statement, I'm sure you will be just as confused as the next business owner.

☐ DO NOT WORRY – I have the solution as I just saved a similar to your business in your street about \$5700 in yearly credit card processing fees. The guy is so happy – I have the same offer for you!

I'm a business consultant specialist and this offer isn't available for everyone. Only for [deborahbrody.com](http://deborahbrody.com) – FOR FREE. Cost to you is NOTHING but 5 minutes of your time.

If you are interested, just let me know and I'll provide more information for you. I apologize if this email is an inconvenience, I just know what I have done for others in your business, and didn't want you to miss too good of an opportunity in.

There are only so many your type of business we can sign up

though – so if you are going to do it, I'll need to hear from you now.

Oh yeah, I know the area where you are located, know it pretty well actually.

☐Thanks for your time!

Cheers!

Jessica

Business Consultant

This could be a textbook example of how not to send an query/pitch letter. Here's what's wrong:

1. **No personalization.** If "Jessica" can find my website, she can also find my name.
2. **Making (wrong) assumptions.** I am losing thousands in credit card fees? Do I even do any credit card processing? And would I be confused by fees?
3. **Poor grammar.** There aren't any spelling mistakes, but "Jessica" certainly did not get an A in her high school English class with this sentence "didn't want you to miss too good of an opportunity in."
4. **Being too informal.** "Oh yeah, I know the area where you are located, know it pretty well actually." (Also, what is that supposed to mean and why is it relevant?)
5. **Being shady.** Notice "Jessica" does not say what she actually does. She also doesn't provide any contact information, business name or anything else.
6. **Insulting my intelligence.** Five minutes of my time is all I need to save thousands. I am sure she also has bridges in Brooklyn for sale for cheap.

The only reason I did not immediate delete this email is because I thought it would make a great blog post.

Have you received these types of emails? What makes you cringe? Please share!