

Take some Twitter advice from Biz Stone

Biz Stone is one of the co-founders of Twitter. He's now CEO of a new company called Jelly. The *Washington Post* ran an interview with him in yesterday's edition, for its On Leadership series. You should read the entire interview but here is Biz's best Twitter tip:

Just be authentic. That's the only way to go. Over and over and over it comes back to that. People try all kinds of different things, and when they just present themselves as human, that's when people connect with them.

Exactly. This is why robo-tweeting, as I discussed a few weeks back, doesn't work. This is why humble-bragging and endless self-promotion turn potential followers off. It's rude and it's not how you would interact in person.

When you act as you do "in real life" you develop real relationships and therefore get the "engagement" that you should be aiming for. You talk with people not at people. You help others out. You act graciously. It's called being human, and if you are a likeable human, you may actually get people wanting to follow you on Twitter.

The most important trait for any communicator

Several months ago I attended a presentation on content marketing. The presenter has become a mini-celebrity in the field, and has even published a book on the subject. However, this person had the unfortunate tendency to let her voice lower so much you had to strain to hear her. It was completely distracting and seriously took away from the content of the presentation. I don't think I could sit through another presentation *in spite of her expertise in the field.*

Just this morning, I came across an article from Inc. Magazine entitled "5 Ways People Hurt Their Credibility." It points out that you can seem less credible by not controlling your voice (the situation I pointed out above) or by having poor posture. **Obviously, as a communicator, it's important to establish your credibility.** Credibility is key to convincing your clients that your communications plan will help boost their recognition or establish their brand. You won't get far in pitching the media if you lack credibility.

There's no doubt that you must establish and protect your credibility and the trait that will allow you do so is **self-awareness**. If you aren't self-aware, you won't even be able to recognize any of the behaviors pointed out in the Inc. article.

So many people are blind to their shortcomings precisely because their biggest shortcoming is a lack of self-awareness. If you aren't able to examine your behaviors and beliefs to find areas for improvement, you aren't able to change. And you will continue to do stuff that may be detrimental to your career.

How do you become more self-aware? You start with the

knowledge that you will need to start paying close attention to what you are doing and how people are reacting to you. You can also ask for feedback to see if how people perceive you is the same as the way you perceive yourself.

Do you agree that self-awareness is the most important trait any communicator should have? If not, what do you think? Let me know in the comments.

Is professional development worth it?

In communications-related professions (PR, advertising, marketing, etc.), we aren't really required or obligated to complete Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to stay up to date or licensed in our fields. That's too bad because things change all the time and you must keep up if you want to stay relevant and informed.

So yes, I think professional development is a must. Since we don't have a defined, structured program like CPAs or social workers trying to maintain licenses and accreditation, how and where do we get our professional development? And how much do we need to pay for it?

There is no one communications industry conference we must attend, but yet there are dozens of communications-related conferences around the country, such as Content Marketing World and PRSA International Conference and others. Some of them are really expensive, as in nearly \$2,000, not including airfare and hotel. Is professional development worth that?

Of course, there are dozens of local lower-cost options, such as lunch and learns, offered to members and nonmembers by the various comms/marketing organizations (IABC, PRSA, AMA, etc.). Webinars are also becoming very popular. And then there are some free options, including various Meetups. But is low cost or even free professional development worthwhile?

My answer is that it depends. An expensive conference may be worth the cost if you learn a lot and make good networking connections. A free meetup may not be worth it if you don't even pick up a useful bit of information. **It's not about cost, it is about value.**

The trouble is that it can be pretty hard to determine the value.

I have attended several lower cost professional development events that have been extremely worthwhile, and then I have gone to some that have been a complete waste of money, time and effort. It' all depends on the quality and background of the presenters and the moderators, and also of the organization. Is the room suited for the presentation? Will you be able to hear and see OK?

Last night I attended a free nonprofit/tech happy hour at a bar (in a private area) with a speaker, who spoke for about ten minutes. I didn't learn anything new. But then again, he didn't have a formal presentation (no PowerPoint) and he was at a very informal setting. Contrast that with a free MeetUp that I attended a couple of weeks ago, in a more formal setting, where the speaker spoke for 45 minutes or longer and had a presentation deck to refer to. I came away from that one with lots of food for thought. Both opportunities were free, both about related subjects, but one had much more value than the other.

One of my favorite, and very inexpensive, professional development opportunities is WordCamp (a volunteer-run,

volunteer-led presentation on all things WordPress). I have been to three already, and am planning to attend WordCamp Philly in a couple of weeks. For the \$20-\$30 price of attendance, I have picked up quite a lot of useful information.

The bottom line is that as a communicator, you must budget time and money for professional development. You'll have to research and attend several types of events to find the ones that offer the most value. Staying current is crucial in communications.

Do you understand why people follow you on Twitter?

Last Friday, as I was checking my @mentions on Twitter, I found the following tweet:

@DBMC I've been following you for a while but you don't follow me back. (Found out with Tweepdash.com)

6:09 PM · 16 May 14



This tweet came from a mobile app developer and it seems to be trying to shame me into a follow. (BTW, according to its website: *"Tweepdash helps you to distinguish mutual followers and people who are not sharing the love. It's very tedious and mind-numbingly boring to sort*

out your Twitter list. Tweepdash gives a quick overview of your total Twitter community.”)

Why haven't I followed this particular Twitter user, or as Tweepdash claims, why am I not “sharing the love?”

Well, for one, I have zero interest in or love for the user's product and even less in the user's Twitter stream. Also, this user has never, ever interacted with me on Twitter other than to follow me (meaning that he/she/it? has not ever re-tweeted anything, or asked me a question, or anything). So, in Tweepdash language, this user has not shown any love for me. Lastly, I don't automatically follow anybody back.

My “following rules” are these:

- Follow people and organizations with whom/which I have a personal connection.
- Follow those with good content in areas that I am interested in (read my profile on Twitter if you want to see what some of those are).
- Follow journalists who cover subjects I am interested in.
- Follow those who have interacted with me on Twitter (other than simply following me) and with whom I have built a “relationship.”

Why do people follow specific Twitter users? Because they are getting something out of it; whether it be information, furthering a connection or sharing an interest.

Following people just to get them to follow you is not a good Twitter strategy. It shows that you don't understand why people use Twitter. It shows that you think all you have to do is show up to the party. But hey, if you've ever been to a large party, you know just showing up and not talking to other people or being uninterested and/or uninteresting will lead to you being all alone.

The bottom line is if you are trying to build a Twitter following, start by understanding why people would follow you on Twitter.

What are your thoughts? Do you automatically follow back? Would you block users you don't care for? And finally, what would you do with the tweet I got?

Answer these basic questions

I was watching the midday news today. We had a lot of rain overnight and there was flooding in some areas. Apparently, there was even flooding in Rockville, where I live. A reporter was out somewhere in Rockville telling about how a car got stuck in a flooded road. Except she never said where in Rockville this road was located. And that's what I really wanted (needed) to know: **where exactly** is it flooded so I can avoid the area.

Perhaps this reporter has forgotten her Journalism 101 class, which teaches that every story should answer these questions:

Who?

What?

Where?

Why?

When?

How?

In fact, the answers to these basic questions are the basis for any story, whether told by a reporter on TV or a public relations practitioner in a press release or a website copywriter. To answer those questions means to tell the most important part of any story. Everything else is additional detail and description that can make a story more compelling or interesting.

And yet, how many press releases are missing answers to these questions? How many websites don't answer the why or the how of whatever product or service they are promoting?

If you want to succeed at storytelling and content marketing, you must answer each and every one of these questions. If you can't, you need more information. If you won't, you are probably trying to hide something or you didn't do your homework.

Need to tell the complete story in your marketing materials? Contact me to see how we can work together to get beyond the basics.

What my gym's #fail can teach you about marketing

At the gym this morning, we experienced a paper towel fail. There are two automated paper towel dispensers on the main floor, and both were out of paper. Since you are supposed to wipe your machine down after exercising (and some of us, knowing most people don't do that, wipe it down before), and people need the paper to do this, we could potentially be looking at many sweat and germ drenched machines.



Treadmills by Montage HOA
on Flickr

In any case, I got the last bit of paper out of one, and was able to wipe my machine and start exercising. After me, at least ten people walked up to the machines, waved at them fruitlessly and walked away. Most just left their machines without wiping them off. A couple of people walked over to the other room and got paper there. And then someone finally reported the missing paper to the front desk.

What is the marketing lesson here? There are three:

1. **Most people will not speak up.** It seems to be something about human psychology that most people will not rock the boat, even if something is wrong.

Marketers should never assume that because no one has said anything, everything is OK. That's why it's so important to measure and check!

2. Most people will not go out of their way, even if they know they should do something. It may be laziness or hurry or something else, but most people will not take extra steps or go out of their way.

Marketers (especially of causes) have to make things as easy as possible. Too many steps will just make people give up.

3. People are completely self-involved. Most people don't notice what is going around them. If so, all those people would have seen there was no paper instead of standing there doing what another person did five seconds before them.

Marketers have to break through both the clutter and the self-involvement.

Comments are always appreciated!

Need help with your marketing materials? If so, contact me to discuss how we can cut through the clutter and make change happen.

Are you scaring off your

prospects?

It seems that many vendors and service providers are resorting to scare tactics to get prospects to do something: renew, register, etc. They use pressure terms and frequent reminders to communicate that if you don't do something right at this moment you will forever be suspended, terminated, interrupted or be victim to some other dire scenario. You won't pass go and you won't collect \$200 for sure.

For example, just this morning I received a renewal email from a county program I am enrolled in. This is the first paragraph, which I have redacted to hide the sender's identity:

Deborah Brody,

Your certification as a registered vendor in the XXX Program will expire within the next 90 days. If you wish to remain in this program, you must renew your registration before 08/04/2014. If you have not renewed your registration by 08/04/2014, your participation in the XXXX will be suspended until you have done so.

Granted, this is not the scariest email, but it is not very friendly. To say my participation will be suspended sounds a bit threatening. What if, instead, it said something like:

Dear Deborah Brody,

You are currently certified as a vendor in the XXXX Program, and your certification is due to expire August 4. We value your participation and ask that you renew your registration by August 4 so that you can remain in the program without interruption.

Better no?

And then there are the endless emails I get from Network

Solutions with subject lines like: *Your Services Will Be Interrupted*. Mind you, I have more than a month until I have to renew, but yet NetSol sends me variations on this email two and three times a day! I feel harassed, and now I am searching for another registrar.

Pressuring your prospects can become a turn-off. Sending too many emails is a form of pressure, and often, adds to the prospect's stress level. You don't want to stress your prospect, do you? What you want is to encourage him/her to make a decision.

Think about motivations, and how people respond. Do people respond positively to a negative pitch? Perhaps some do. However, as the refrain goes, you attract more bees with honey than with vinegar. Compliments are better than criticisms. Feeling like a hero is better than feeling like a deadbeat loser.

What do you think? How do you respond to negative emails? Do you ever feel harassed or threatened by vendors and service providers?

Is social media savvy a learned skill?

Today, on one the many social media blogs I follow, I saw yet another post on how to use LinkedIn effectively ("5 tips to improve your LinkedIn experience" or some such).

Also today, coincidentally, I received a generic "let's connect on LinkedIn" invitation (the third in the past week and a half) from someone I have never met, and with whom I

have no connections in common.

One of the five tips to use LinkedIn effectively was not to send generic invitations, but rather to take the time to personalize the invitation and explain why you want to connect.

By the way, the invitation today was from another writer. I know she could've come up with a sentence or two on her own. But she didn't. Was she being lazy? Does she understand how to use LinkedIn effectively? Has she never read an article about how to use LinkedIn effectively or is that I am the only one that has seen the same five tips regurgitated in article after article after article?

This got me to thinking: can you learn how to be savvy on social media or do you have to be born that way? Or put another way, are the people who could benefit the most from the "5 tips" articles precisely the ones that don't read those articles BECAUSE they don't follow social media (read blogs, interact on Twitter, etc.)?

It's not just LinkedIn (as an aside, how many of your network still don't have pictures on their profiles?). It's Twitter. It's Facebook. We see people doing stupid things all the time, the same things which get endlessly pointed out in how-to and tips articles everywhere...on social media.

There's an older communicator whom I know tangentially. She didn't understand how to use Twitter, in spite of being on it, in spite of the many resources out there. When I pointed something out to her, something so obvious, she actually thanked me. She needed to learn. She needed to be taught. But the thing is that she didn't know she needed to learn because she was (is) not social media savvy.

It's like people who use caps lock in their email. They don't know they are "shouting."

What do you think? Can people become more social media savvy? How will they learn if they never seem to see the many resources out there? Do you share my frustration?

You need a great headline...and great content

We all know how important headlines are. When we are constantly scanning our devices, we need to be able to select what we want to read quickly, and headlines help us do that. So, no argument here about great headlines.

However, what happens when the article associated with the great headline is not so great?

Case in point: My mother happened to see a headline promising seven secrets to getting the best seats on a plane. She was intrigued as she flies quite frequently. And as anybody who has flown in the past year knows, comfortable seating is now a thing of the past as airlines try to cram more seats in a plane while charging fees for sitting in areas like the bulkhead and emergency row.

Well, guess what the main “secret” to getting a better seat is? Pay for it. Seriously. This article, promising seven “secrets” to get better seats, had **two** main suggestions (a more accurate term for what the article offered): check the aircraft seating map and pay if you have to.

Needless to say, this useless article did not live up to its

headline. Since the article was so poor, I don't even remember who wrote it. However, I do know what website this garbage was on. It makes me question whether other articles on that website are as bad.

The bottom line is that writing a great headline is not enough. If your content fails to live up to headline what you are doing is tricking your readers, and readers do not like to be tricked.

Getting readers to your content is important, but if your content disappoints, you will end up with disappointed readers. That is not a strategy for growth.

Have you come across articles that don't live up to their headlines? Did that change your behavior toward the source?

7 Solutions to Blogger's Block

It happens to all of us. Sometimes we just can't/won't blog. We are out of ideas. Or, if we do have ideas, they don't gel enough to form a good blog post. Perhaps we are being perfectionists. Or perhaps we are burned out.

Does having blogger's block mean you should give up your blog? I don't think so!

Here are seven solutions to deal with blogger's block:

If the problem is lack of ideas:

1. **Revisit and update an old post.** Check your archives. What post had good traction? Review it and re-use it. Update as necessary.

2. **Shake up your routine to inspire creativity.** Creativity experts suggest shaking up your normal way of doing things – such as taking a different route to work, brushing your teeth with the opposite hand—in order to help your brain form new ideas. Once you have, sit down and brainstorm ten different ideas for blog posts. Write them down. Revisit them as necessary.

3. **Create a “compilation” post.** Instead of writing a brand new post, compile or curate resources, articles or lists. You could do a “round-up” of blog posts or articles (e.g. 5 best articles on SEO) or research a list of resources (e.g. 15 upcoming tech conferences).

4. **Interview someone.** Come up with five questions and pose them to your company president, a colleague, an industry leader or to whomever it makes sense. Alternatively, try interviewing someone via Skype, and post the video of the interview (and if possible, a written transcript).

If the problem is burnout:

5. **Solicit guest bloggers.** Reach out to people you know—other bloggers, professionals in your industry, friends—and ask them to write a post. Make sure to provide a topic and guidance (and a deadline).

6. **Try a different format.** If you always write your posts, what about doing a video blog or a podcast? Or how about having a graphic post (heavy on images, light on words).

7. **Take a break.** Sometimes you need time off to recharge. You should write a post explaining the blog is on a short hiatus or that you are on vacation. You should probably say when the blog will be back. If you are uncomfortable not having

content during your break you may want to re-post popular older posts or seek evergreen content. If you have a white paper or book, you could run excerpts.

What do you do when you are struck with blogger's block? Please share your suggestions and solutions in the comments.