

# Hosting a speaker or a panel? Read this first.

Have you been to an event where the speaker did not meet your expectations? It may not have been the speaker's fault. He or she may have not been well prepared or well chosen for that particular event. Having been asked to speak at a few different events, I can tell you it is up to the host to prepare the speaker.



Empty Podium by Karin Dalziel on Flickr

If you (or your organization) is hosting an event featuring speakers, here are a few things to do:

1. Determine exactly what your topic is and whether you have a theme you want to highlight.
2. Make sure you understand your audience. Who will be coming to your event and why? If it is a professional development event, for example, what level of understanding does the audience have about the subject?
3. When choosing your speakers, make sure their experience

matches your topic and audience. Recently, a friend attended a talk where the speaker's understanding of the topic was BELOW the audience's. Generally, the audience wants to learn something.

4. Prepare your speakers. Give them all the information they will need for the event, including date, time and location. I know several speakers who have been late to an event (causing them to get frazzled) because they were confused about how to get there or the exact start time. Tell your speakers how many people are expected, who they are and what you told the audience to expect.

5. Talk to the speaker a couple of days before the event. What will he or she be talking about exactly? Does he or she need any special equipment?

6. Have a plan B (or be prepared for things to go off track: missing presentations, faulty AV equipment, missing speakers, etc.)

7. Prepare you audience by giving an introduction of both the speaker and the topic. Make sure the program handout includes the speaker's bio and contact information. When introducing the speaker, stay topline. Nothing is more boring (and more time-wasting) than having the host read the entire biography to the audience.

The bottom line is that most speaking events don't go well because the host has not done a good job of choosing or preparing the speakers. This is particularly common in volunteer-run organizations. However, if you are charging for your event, and you are associating your organization's name to it, it is imperative that you take the time to make sure the speaker is given the best shot at success.

What would you add to the list above? Does your organization have a list of speaker guidelines? If so, what does it include?

---

# Things on my mind

For some reason, I have had a hard time getting a post done this week. I wrote two lengthy posts, but ended up saving them as drafts. They may appear later on. Some of my ability to focus this week has to do with having too much on my mind. I thought I would share some of what has been bugging me (and sadly, this is but the tip of the iceberg).

## **Courtesy is waning**

It seems to me that we are seeing a huge drop in courteous behavior. In the last few weeks alone, I have seen it both personally and professionally. On the personal side, I have left messages for friends that have gone unreturned. I have been cut off in the middle of a sensitive conversation. On the professional side, I have sent proposals that potential clients don't even acknowledge.

## **Angie's List won't leave me alone (or, is trying too hard and being annoying)**

When I moved into my house a couple of years ago, I joined Angie's List. It was helpful when I needed to find different contractors (plumber, fence installer, etc.). After getting most issues fixed in my house, I found I was using Angie's List quite infrequently. And then, one of the contractors I found on it (and who had decent recommendations) turned out to be one of the worst experiences I have ever had with any service provider. So I let my membership lapse. This was in December of last year. Since then, without fail, I have received offers EVERY week (and sometimes every day) from Angie's List for discount membership...ranging from 20% to 40% off. I have stop reading the emails and just delete them. At

some point, Angie and every other vendor, needs to realize it is not about the offer. You could give me Angie's List for free, and at this point, I am not signing up. Oh, and I see their constant advertising every night on the CBS Evening News, which leads me to believe that Angie is lying when she says that nobody pays to be on Angie's List. She cannot be making the type of money she is from yearly membership dues alone. And, vendors have told me that in order to show up higher in the rankings, they are asked to pay.

### **Customer service is marketing**

A few weeks ago I had problems with my web host, Host Gator. In three separate instances, my website and email went down for a total of a few hours. I asked them for a credit (after not getting any information from them on restoration of service). They ignored it. Even after I told them in their survey that they would not be getting any referrals from me, they didn't seem to care.

Another service provider who has been very slow in her service has had the nerve to blame me, in writing, for her delays. Apparently she doesn't realize that even if it is the client's fault (and in this case it isn't) you don't blame the client. By shifting the responsibility and accusing me (the client) all she is doing is making sure I will not use her services ever again, nor refer her any business. How you treat your customer is marketing, as Lisa Gerber points out in this blog post.

### **On the other hand...**

I have been impressed with the responsiveness and interest I receive for this blog from some great folks that I have only met on Twitter. Thank you!

---

# Why Uber is successful

Have you heard about Uber? Basically, it's an on-demand a car service that you "hail" via app, web or text message. The service is available in major cities in the US, including San Francisco, Boston, New York and Washington, DC, some European capitals and a few cities in Asia, including Singapore.

I started hearing about Uber on Twitter, but had never experienced it personally until recently. My friend Barb Jump had invited me to join her at the Kennedy Center. After the performance, *in the elevator*, Barb said she would get a car service to pick us up.

Barb texted Uber, Uber sent back a confirmation, and nine minutes later, Kareem (the driver) was pulling up to pick up in a town car, complete with bottled water, tissues and mints. Apparently nine minutes is a long wait time, because Barb says they are usually there in about four minutes, which if you live in Washington, means it is much quicker than waiting for the Metro.

What turned Barb on to Uber were two basic issues: she doesn't carry cash and she doesn't feel safe hailing a cab at night as a woman alone in the city. Uber solves these two issues. Since you must set up an account beforehand, the payment is charged to your credit card on file, thus there is no need for cash (or figuring out the tip, since there is no tipping). And, since you are directly ordering a car from Uber, you are not getting some random cabby. Uber also sends you the name of the driver and his/her picture so you know who to expect.

## **Fill a need and differentiate from the competition**

Uber is successful because it found some very specific needs

that were not being met by traditional taxis or car services. As its website says quite succinctly, these three needs are: request from anywhere, ride with style and convenience, and hassle-free payment. These could also be called DIFFERENTIATORS. As a plus, for Barb (and for other women), these also translate to added safety.

The bottom line is that for a business to succeed it has to meet a need that is not being adequately met by others in the marketplace. And to be uber-successful (jeez, aren't I clever?) it has to meet those needs while differentiating itself from any competition.

### **Fulfill your brand promise**

Everybody knows that saying something and doing it are two different things. If you do what you say you do, you are, in effect, fulfilling your brand promise. Uber's tagline is Everyone's Private Driver. I think Uber certainly lives up to that tagline's promise—anyone can set up account, “hail” an Uber from their smartphone (anywhere they may be) and get a driver whom they will recognize because Uber provides this information beforehand.

Have you experienced Uber or other companies that are succeeding by differentiating well and living up to their promise?

---

## **Top 3 most annoying LinkedIn**

# behaviors

I just got an email from LinkedIn telling me Tom and Sue (not their real names) have endorsed me. The thing is the endorsement from Sue is worth something. She's someone I respect and whom I have known for several years now. Her endorsement is real while Tom's is not. I have never known Tom in a professional capacity or worked with him. I know him from school and he is endorsing me for things that are not even on my profile. This leads me to my top three most annoying LinkedIn behaviors.

## **#3: Fake endorsements**

I am really not sure why people do this. Do they want a fake endorsement in return? Is it fun to play with LinkedIn? What is it?



16/50 -grr!! by THEMACGIRL on Flickr

## **#2: Posting too much and about non-business topics**

Yes, I guess this could be two behaviors, but in my experience they go hand-in-hand. People who post too much are also posting about extraneous stuff. Remember that you want to showcase what you do, and unless you are a veterinarian, that

stuff about how kittens need extra blankets in the winter is great for Facebook but has no place on LinkedIn.

### **#1: Sending generic LinkedIn invitations** (perennial “winner”)

Stop doing this. I don't understand why people you don't know in person, who feel they would like to connect with you , can't seem to scare up a couple of lines to provide some context, some reason, or some personality.

What annoys you on LinkedIn? Yes, you can vent right here!

---

## **Wait—why you can't rely on spell-check**

Yesterday, while working out at the gym, I nearly fell off the treadmill when I spotted the following ad from Sephora in InStyle magazine:

Sephora ad

At first, I thought perhaps Sephora was engaging in a not-so-clever play on words, since the wait could be over for a weight-less product. But I see no evidence in the copy that Sephora is highlighting any weightlessness in this product. In fact, the sub-headline says: “Finally, smoother, softer, satiny style in half the time.” Clearly, the concept is about time, so the appropriate word would have been wait, not weight.

It is hard to believe that Sephora's ad people would have let this one go to print. Back when I was a print buyer in the 90s, we sent actual film to our magazines. A mistake in the film would be a major problem, and fixing it would involve

high cost. Today, ad agencies send over PDF's, which are way easier to fix and re-send.

So next time you think you proofread your document and used spell-check to do so, I suggest you wait, and read it again.

Do you think the headline is right? Let me know why.

---

## **About that special offer...just how special is it?**

Many businesses use special offers to try to lure customers in or to retain existing customers. Whether it is a discount for new customers, a gift with purchase or buy-one-get-one free, special offers are all over. The question is are these offers working for the business AND are they working for the customer?



Special by Dave Cobb on Flickr

I have been going to a massage clinic for a while, and through the years, its rates have climbed steadily, which makes it harder to get massages regularly. The clinic started offering a deal to holders of a local rewards card, which you buy for \$25 and which provides a variety of discounts with local businesses. The deal was that you would get a 75-minute massage for the price of a 60-minute massage, or 15 minutes free. There is very little cost to the clinic for this deal, and the value is only about \$15.

Since I was booking a 60-minute massage anyway, why not get an extra 15 minutes, right? I did so back in February, and then I booked it again for this week. Well, I got an email back from the massage therapist telling me the deal had expired and that she would be happy to give me a 75-minute massage for the regular price. Needless to say, I was not happy. I wrote back that it was disappointing that they would have this offer on their website scheduler and then not honor it. Then, the clinic's owner wrote me to tell me that no, the offer hadn't expired, it simply was valid for a ONE-TIME USE, and since I had used it in February, I was no longer entitled to it. BUT,

because I was a “loyal” customer, she would pay the massage therapist the difference (words designed to make me feel guilty...but that is a subject for another post).

Nowhere on the clinic’s website does it say anything about the offer being a one-time deal. In fact, the only place referencing this is the website for the rewards card (in fairly small print). Nobody else on the rewards program has a one-time deal. It is all discounts for first time customers or ongoing discounts such as a 10% discount at a dry cleaner’s and so forth.

What we have here is a special offer that a) has no clear purpose and b) does not have clear (and common) rules for usage. The result is little gain to the business and disappointment to the customer.

When deciding on a special offer, businesses need to do a bit of strategic thinking and planning. Here are some guidelines before you issue any type of special offer.

1) **Have a clear marketing goal in mind.** Are you training to attract new customers? Are you trying to build loyalty? What do you hope to accomplish with this offer?

2) **Have a real offer (with real value).** A special offer should be special, that is, a customer should be getting something that he or she really wants and that incentivizes the customer with the goal in mind. That is, if you want a new customer, then make it worthwhile for a new customer to try your service or product (hint–10% off is usually not a great offer for first-time users).

3) **Have clear rules** that are communicated to the customer BEFORE he/she attempts to use your special offer.

4) **Be prepared to honor your special offer.** When you don’t honor an offer you risk alienating the customer.

5) **Have a way of tracking the offer.** If your goal was to get new customers, how many came because the offer? Have regular customers been taking advantage of the offer and is it translating to an overall increase in sales?

**Whatever your special offer is, make sure it really is special, both for your business and for your customer.**

---

## **Do you know what your customer's experience is really like?**

It's painfully obvious that in many companies, marketing is completely separate from customer service and on another planet from company operations. This is why we often see marketing communications that have nothing in common with the actual experience of using a product or service.

I have written about this several times before, but **as long as marketing is divorced from customer experience, companies will cultivate poor relationships with their customers.**

Recently, I stayed at a Holiday Inn Express. You know, where the marketing says that you will be smarter just by staying there. In reality, the walls were paper thin, making sleeping a challenge; the bathroom was cramped, making getting ready a challenge; and to top it off, I could smell breakfast cooking in my room, half-way down the hall on the second floor at 6:30 in the morning. Oh, and if this weren't enough, when I tried to work out in the fitness closet, I was greeted by an overheated

room, with no temperature controls, and outdated, hard-to-use equipment. It didn't help that the front desk seem disinterested, and not once greeted me when I walked in the door.

I did not feel smarter by staying at the Holiday Inn. In fact, I felt taken. Their pricing for this location is on par with a hotel, not the motel they truly are.

While I was staying at this hotel I kept thinking that the hotel manager and the front desk people had never spent a night at their own motel. Or perhaps they had, which is why they were rarely to be seen and seemed so unenthusiastic about their jobs. What I know for certain is that whoever does the marketing for Holiday Inn Express wants you to believe that this place is tops. But, you will only believe it if you have a positive customer experience. **If you, like me, have a negative customer experience, not only will you scoff at the marketing, but you will likely become a vampire instead of brand ambassador. That is, you will take away customers rather than bring business.**

If you want to have marketing communications that work LONG TERM, then you must learn about your customer's experiences with your product or service. You want to know the unvarnished truth. **If the experience is consistently bad, you have to fix the experience, not the marketing.**

**Ultimately, the most amazing communications/marketing campaign can't sell a bad product or service.**

---

# We're off for the week!

Caffeinated views is taking a break this week, so there will be no posts. We'll be back next week with our usual marketing and communications insights.

Happy Independence Day and Fourth of July holiday!

---

## Is your blog social?

Today, I presented "Using your Blog as a Centerpiece in your Social Media Strategy" at the PRSA Mid-Atlantic Chesapeake District Conference. It was a great session with lots of great questions.

Here's the PowerPoint presentation on SlideShare

**Blog social media strategy prsamd brody slide share from DeborahBrody**

Let me know if you have any further questions.

If you'd like to learn more about blogging, sign up for my next How to Blog workshop, taking place on July 18 in Baltimore. Here are the details.

---

## How companies #fail at using

# Twitter

Twitter is second only to Facebook in brand marketing (85% to Facebook's 91%, according to Social Media Examiner's 2013 Social Media Marketing Report). It's safe to say that Twitter is part of most organizational social media strategies. Yet, many companies do not seem to understand how to use Twitter or how to use it to connect with their customers.



FAIL stamp by Hans Gewirtz on Flickr.  
Read more here:  
<http://hans.gewirtz.com/2011/03/07/fail-stamp.html>

How do companies #fail at Twitter?

## 1. They fail to update their profile

Have you ever gone to a Twitter profile and found a link to a blog that has not been updated since 2009? Or how about a company that does not list its current website? It takes minutes to update a Twitter profile. There is no excuse. And don't even get me started on those companies (and individuals) who are using the default Twitter egg as their profile pic...

## **2. They fail to seize opportunities**

As on most Sundays, yesterday I watched CBS Sunday Morning (some of the best morning TV out there). There were lots of great stories, including one about a Brooklyn pickle manufacturer. It was a nice story, and gave the company great publicity. CBS tweeted out a link to the video and mentioned the company's Twitter handle. I went to check it. The company never promoted its appearance on CBS and the only mention of it was the re-tweet of CBS's video link after the fact. That is a missed opportunity.

## **3. They fail to use Twitter beyond self-promotion**

Too many companies think that Twitter is a one-way megaphone where they can trumpet their awards and recognitions or think of it as an easy way to push out news releases and personnel announcements. While there is room for this type of promotion, if a company's stream is devoted solely to itself, it is not "engaging" with its audience.

## **4. They fail to understand how people expect companies to use Twitter**

Related to the above, companies who use Twitter as a self-promotional news stream, don't understand people expect to be able to interact with them. Twitter is a social media network, and the word social is there first for a reason. Social has up-ended the way that companies must communicate with their audiences. Instead of one-way communication, social media has given companies a way of having two-way communications with their customers.

## **5. They fail to understand that Twitter is real-time**

Perhaps waiting 24 hours to return a phone call or an email is standard business practice, but it won't fly on Twitter. When somebody is asking something on Twitter (or other social media networks), they are expecting a real-time answer, much the

same as if they were having an in-person conversation. Answering a Twitter @ query hours or days later is ineffective and completely inappropriate to the medium.

## **6. They fail to understand “social shame”**

Companies who disregard/ignore/fail to check @ messages on Twitter are unaware of the concept of social shame. Like it or not, individuals turn to Twitter when they have a problem, figuring companies want to preserve their reputations and will respond or try to fix the problem. Many companies don't seem to understand the amplification involved in social media. If I complain about a company, my followers may see it but people who use Twitter's search function will also see it.

What other company failures on Twitter have you seen? Please add your thoughts in the comments.

### **UPDATE July 9, 2013**

Failure can include auto-tweeting replies. Seems that Bank of America has been doing that, quite inappropriately, according to this story on Consumerist.