

# Are your volunteers on message?

Nonprofits are notorious for having difficulty with communications. Many times, it has to do with lack of funds (and thus, insufficient support). What many nonprofits tend to have in spades, however, is volunteers. Volunteers are great for nonprofit organizations. They can staff an event, or help serve lunch, or provide input, or, maybe most important, help spread the word about the nonprofit.

And yet, some nonprofits don't seem to appreciate the role that volunteers play in communications. Let me give you two examples.

## **A chaotic, disorganized volunteer experience**

Around Christmas, I volunteered to do some gift-wrapping with a DC-based nonprofit. The sign-up form indicated I was to work from 10 am to 3 pm. I arrived at 10 am, only to find a bit of chaos. The volunteer director told me to go one place, where I was promptly told to go back to where I started. The volunteer manager had limited ability to organize, and ended up wasting a lot of time. Two other volunteers were grouching along with me on how disorganized the event was. We didn't start wrapping (in a very chaotic and inefficient manner—also lacking tape, wrapping paper, etc.) until about 11 am. One full hour was wasted. No water or snacks were offered. No guidance as to how long we were expected to stay. When I left around 12:30 pm, no one even noticed or thanked me. In fact, I never got a thank you at all. I will not be volunteering with this organization ever again.

There are two different issues at play here. One is the negative impact of disorganization on people who volunteer. People (like me) who have a bad experience volunteering won't

volunteer with your organization again, and worse, will tell others of their bad experience. The second issue is that volunteer leaders are not being given the tools to make sure they provide both a message and a positive experience, quite possibly because the volunteering role is not valued.

### **Volunteers who don't have the right (or any) information**

Just this week, someone in my network invited me to attend a business networking event run by a large nonprofit. The invitation said the price of the event itself was \$75, but attendees were required to donate a minimum of \$500 to the nonprofit during the calendar year. I pointed out that the real cost of attending this event would be \$575 to the person who invited me. He called and emailed me to tell me that the \$500 was "only if I wanted to donate" and that the event fee was "totally separate." However, the invitation clearly stated that the annual contribution was required.

Volunteers need to know the facts...all of them. But more importantly, they need to know the reason for the information they are sharing. The nonprofit above SHOULD have informed my contact about the requirements for the event, but moreover, should have told him WHY this event has a minimum contribution, why it is necessary, what the contribution is for (what are the impacts etc.).

Imagine if this guy had come back to me and said this instead: Yes, you are right. You will be required to donate \$500 during the year, which by the way, you can give in several installments, not all at once. That money will be used to fund our X initiative, which helps X number of people. Also, you will be assured of meeting some awesome business leaders at the event, and we will be having other events during the year.

I suspect that this volunteer was only told to recruit people to come to the event. He didn't get any additional information or a script or any other tools that would help him

not only recruit attendees, but spread the message about the work the nonprofit is doing and will do with additional funds.

Volunteers can help with a nonprofit's tasks. And volunteers help communicate the nonprofit's message. Are your volunteers on message?

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## **Why would you highlight that?**

It's great to highlight your USP (Unique Selling Proposition). In fact, you should. You should communicate to your target audience what makes you special or different than others, especially if you are in a crowded marketplace. A couple of days ago, I came across this ad in the newspaper:







**Free Pickup & Delivery**  
Includes Moving Furniture, Rolling and Relaying Your Rugs!

# Hadeed

ORIENTAL RUG CLEANING  
& IN-HOME/OFFICE SERVICES

*If You Stand On It,  
Joe Hadeed  
Stands Behind It!*

## GRAND OPENING! of our RUG SALES SHOWROOM!

Every Size Available! 2x3 All  
The Way to Embassy Size!  
Incredible Selection with a  
3 Million Dollar Inventory!

**RUGS  
30%-50%  
OFF!**



Scan This  
to See Our  
Entire  
Inventory!

889 W Maple Ave. Vienna, VA 703-962-6984

**25% Off**  
First Cleaning  
OR  
**50% Off**  
Initial Cleaning  
With a 6-time  
service package  
**Maid Service**

\*Expires 1/19/13.  
Not valid w/any  
other offers.

Any 3 Areas (400 sf)  
**\$99\***  
4 to 7 Areas (600 sf)  
**\$169\***  
8-10 Areas (1000 sf)  
**\$269\***

**Wall to Wall  
Steam  
Cleaning**

\*Expires 1/19/13.  
Not valid w/any other  
offers. Basic steam  
clean

**10%  
Off**

**In-Plant  
Rug  
Cleaning**

\*Expires 1/19/13.  
Not valid w/any  
other offers.

**5%  
Off**

**In-Plant Rug  
Restoration  
& Repair**

\*Expires 1/19/13.  
Not valid w/any  
other offers.

**\$80**  
Each Bathroom  
Floor  
Coloring & Sealing  
Available Upon  
Request  
\$99 minimum order.

**Tile and  
Grout  
Cleaning**

\*Ceramic & Porcelain  
only. Expires 1/19/13.  
Not valid w/any other  
offers. Residential only.

**\$85 Off**  
Whole House  
Air Duct  
Cleaning  
(Per System)

**Dryer Vent  
Cleaning only  
\$95**

\*Expires 1/19/13.  
Not valid w/any  
other offers.

Call or visit  
our website  
For Details!

Hurry Enroll in the

**BUCKS!**  
Rewards Program

All Loyalty Cards Come  
Preloaded with \$50-\$3000!

A Trusted Resource Since 1955  
for Cleaning, Repair, and  
Restoration of the Region's  
Finest Carpets & Rugs.

**USHII**

All Hadeed Employees Go Through  
a Rigorous Background Check by  
**UNITED STATES HOMELAND  
INVESTIGATIONS INC.**

Have Peace of Mind Knowing That All of Our  
Employees Are Professional & Courteous with  
No Criminal Background! Drug Free &  
Authorized to work in the U.S.

You Must  
Check Out Our  
New Website!

889 W Maple Ave. Alexandria, VA 1-703-466-9704 | 301-637-1163

Find a complete listing of all our  
convenient drop-off locations at... **HadeedCarpet.com**

above has numerous claims for your attention: special pricing, free pick up, new showroom, new website AND that they have vetted their employees. In short, there's too much. They sell rugs but they also clean rugs.

Besides having too much information, the fact this company is making sure you know that all their employees are checked out—that they have no criminal background, are drug-free and authorized to work in the US—is problematic.

The problem is that this company is bringing up a question that perhaps was not even on their customers' minds. Sure, it's good to say employees are carefully vetted, but to highlight that they have been submitted to a "rigorous background check" makes me wonder if a) they have had a problem with dishonest/criminal employees before; 2) whether this particular industry has a problem with criminals (and if so, why?) or 3) is this the most important thing I need to know about this company?

What do most customers want to know before they contract with a carpet cleaning company? That's the key question. This ad does not answer that. It tells me price is important as is location. I should be enticed by free pick up and delivery, and that I should rest assured that none of the employees I deal with are "illegal immigrants" or druggies or have a criminal background.

What you choose to highlight in your marketing communications pieces should be relevant to your audience's needs.

Your thoughts?

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**4. Acknowledge the reality on the ground.** This year we have seen several advertisers (and a politician or two) who just did not get it. Like Pepco, who continued patting itself on its back about “reliability” when hundreds of thousands of customers were without power during extreme heat for several days.

**5. Depending on Facebook (or any free, third-party service) as a marketing platform will cost you.** Sure, you can have a Facebook page for free, but figuring out its ever changing policies will cost you in time and effort.

**6. Stop scheduling your tweets!** Tweeting about your fun weekend ahead while people are mourning 20 dead children is tacky and preventable. Twitter is about immediacy, engagement and responsiveness. Scheduled tweets are just the opposite.

What lessons did you draw from the year that was? Anything jump out at you? If so, please share in the comments.

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## **Dealing with the haters (on social media)**

Perhaps its a sign that our social fabric is stretched too thin. Perhaps people don't know how to behave when they have the cover of social media. What is happening more and more is that people are expressing hate and hateful things to strangers on social media channels.

On Twitter, haters will search for ideas that they disagree with and then attack whoever tweeted those thoughts. On blogs, people will leave nasty comments. On news sites, people will disparage others they disagree with. Social media seems rife with haters and trolls.

How do you deal with all these haters?

First, do NOT take these comments personally.

Second, ignore the hater/troll. Most of these people are attention-seekers or enjoy getting an angry reaction from others. On Twitter, go to the hater's profile and block him or her. On your blog, discard the comment (you are under no obligation to provide a platform for others' ideas, especially if they are contrary to your own and expressed in a disrespectful manner). If feasible, delete the comments on Facebook.

I am not saying to get rid of all comments that show a different viewpoint or even that question you, just get rid of comments that are obviously motivated by hate or the desire to incite argument.

Third, move on. Social media is a constantly changing landscape, and what was interesting and hot five minutes ago may not be now.

How do you deal with haters or trolls? Would you add anything?

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# Marketers who assume targets are stupid

There are marketers out there who believe that their target audience is made up of stupid people. People who will buy anything, believe anything and do anything.

These marketers are the bottom-feeder telemarketers who tend to use robo-calls or use auto-dialers to call frequently at different times on different days. They play the CALLER ID system by using non-specific identifiers such as “Card Services” or “Holiday Rebate.” (I got a call today that had the CALLER ID as “Important Call”– yes, really.) They ignore the Do Not Call List and refuse to take you off their rolls.

These marketers use direct mail with no targeting or culling of lists. They send offers that are too good to be true. They ask for sensitive information just to enter you in a drawing for a fantastic prize you have zero chance of winning.

These marketers think that by running the same TV ad or print ad over and over and over and over again you will finally be convinced to cough up three convenient payments of \$19.99 plus shipping and handling.

These marketers think that by using an actor dressed as a doctor in an advertisement they are proving their miracle pill has been tested and approved by a reliable source.

These marketers think that sending spam email that says “Secure Notification” on the subject line will make you open an email from a bank with which you have no business.

These marketers think people are stupid and will buy anything that sounds great or will be scared by a letter that says this is your final notice (even though you haven’t gotten any notice before or even do business with that company).

Preying on people's stupidity or gullibility or fear is not ethical. It is not good marketing. And marketers who engage in these practices give all marketers a bad name.

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## Depending on outside vendors: it's risky

Today, I can't use Outlook. Why? My ISP, Verizon, is not working. A colleague can't access her email. Why? Her web host is having server issues. So we sit and wait and pressure these service providers to fix these things because it affects our business.

Although we can't control everything, on some communications-related issues, we have more control than others. I can pressure my ISP to fix my email issues, but I can't do a thing about Facebook and its ever changing rules and features. (Facebook has changed EdgeRank, affecting brand pages) I don't have any control over Twitter and its decision not to play nice with Instagram (Twitter will no longer display Instagram photos on its site).

I also can't do much about Google, Gmail or any number of Internet-based applications and software that we are becoming increasingly dependent on.

Marketers who enthusiastically recommend having a Facebook page, or an Instagram account, or signing up for Pinterest **MUST** take into consideration that these are services and that as a brand, you are putting yourself at the mercy of their decisions, which do affect you, often without your input or control.

Many of the most problematic outside vendors (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) are free to use. As users, we have no leverage. We are getting what we pay for.

A few years ago, a local website decided to get rid of its URL and use Facebook exclusively. Guess what, that website did not survive.

Be aware that by using the cloud, or using third-party services, you are agreeing to give up control. You may want more of that control than you realize.

Thoughts?

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## **How to make networking events a better marketing opportunity**

Everybody goes to networking events at one point or another. Some go because they feel they have to and others go because they love to network. The bottom line is that networking is an integral part of marketing, both personal and business. Opportunities always stem from personal relationships and networking is just the path to extend and strengthen your personal relationships.

December is probably the prime networking month as there are all sorts of holiday parties and end of year ceremonies. But if you don't think about your networking, all you will end up doing is wasting time (and money).



Handshake by B.T. Indrelunas on Flickr

The inspiration for this post was a woman I “met” at a party last week. I didn’t actually meet her because she was a walking networking don’t. She approached me and a friend, greeted us, but didn’t introduce herself. She babbled about the holidays (actually told us about her Thanksgiving dinner), and then said she wanted to get food, and turned around and left. Some time later, she sat down next to me and did not even try to make conversation. She wandered around the party aimlessly. Someone told me she was job-hunting. My impression was that she was slightly unhinged, and had no idea of how to connect with people.

Don’t be like that woman! You can make networking events a good marketing tool for yourself or your business if you follow some dos and don’ts.

**Do this:**

**Have an objective in mind.** You should ask yourself what you would like to get out of this event.

**Work on your introduction.** Have a short but complete overview of who you are, something like: Hi, my name is Jane Doe, and I am a graphic designer at XZ agency, an Anytown-based

advertising agency that specializes in the tech industry.

**Perfect your handshake, smile and body language.** A strong but not bone crushing grip, a nice smile and an open stance will help make you more likeable.

**Think about your appearance.** Match your dress to the occasion. If it's a holiday party, be festive. If it is a morning business meeting, then dress in your business best!

**Be interested in the other person.** Ask questions and be genuinely interested in the answers.

**Have business cards at the ready.** Yes, I know people can Google you and phone tap you and whatever, but exchanging business cards is a tangible way to initiate contact.

**Follow up.** Make sure to send an email to people you have met soon after the event to help establish the connection. You may even suggest going to coffee or lunch and use the opportunity to get to know the person.

**But don't do this:**

**Hand out business cards indiscriminately.** Exchange cards with someone only after you have spoken.

**Go for quantity.** Some people feel they must work the room and meet everyone. I believe that quality is better than quantity, that is, it is better to meet a couple of people who will remember who you are, than a whole bunch of people than can't place you.

**Have a bad handshake.** This includes the limp handshake, the overly strong handshake, the clammy handshake, and one that I experienced last week, the calloused, rough skin on the hand shake (use moisturizer!!!).

**Be overly self-deprecating.** Don't diminish your accomplishments by letting your insecurity shine through.

**Act weird.** Some people take pride in marching to the beat of a different drummer, and that is fine. But. There is personality and then there is weirdness. Some people (like the woman I mentioned above) don't pick up on social cues. Or then there was the guy who went to the holiday party in a kilt. Using a kilt is limited to the following occasions: when you are a schoolgirl in uniform, at your family's Scottish ancestral ceremony or it is Halloween. You don't want to get attention for the wrong reasons.

Happy networking this holiday season. You may just be a party away from meeting your next employer, project or friend!

What are your networking dos and don'ts?

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## **As easy as 1, 2, 3 (or not)**

Last week, I read a guest post on a popular PR blog that counseled people to spend 10 minutes a year on their LinkedIn profile and to schedule one or two tweets a day "to maintain a presence on Twitter."

Can you do social media in a few minutes a year? Sure you *can*. But, the question is not whether you can, it is whether you *should*. And if you think you can achieve good outcomes by doing it the easy way, you are in for a big surprise.



Photo by idlphoto from Flickr

Marketing in general, and social media marketing in particular, are not easy tasks. In fact, to achieve results, you have to spend lots of time and effort (and sometimes money too). Anybody who tells you you can do it a couple of minutes a day is lying to you (or maybe just misleading you). **Just having or maintaining a presence is simply not enough.**

Your goal may be to just have a presence. But why would that be your goal? If you are marketing (yourself, a product, a cause, an idea), you probably have goal that involves movement (more followers, more buyers, more supporters). Just being is not going to move your goal very far forward.

Take Twitter. If you schedule your tweets and then do nothing else, what exactly are you achieving? Not engagement, that's for sure. Twitter is a responsive platform. People comment and respond in real time. If you don't participate in real time, and respond quickly, I am not sure you should be on Twitter at all. Beside the fact that one or two tweets a day will likely get missed, especially if there is something else going on (and breaking news breaks on Twitter).

Take LinkedIn. If you refresh your profile one time per year,

and then don't do anything else, you aren't going to appear on the timeline. People will forget about you.

Perhaps what the guess blogger I referenced above was trying to say is that you have to have a minimum presence if you are going to participate in social media channels. However, you can't and shouldn't be satisfied with the minimum. You need to MAXIMIZE your presence if you are trying to achieve goals. And perhaps you don't need to be on every social media channel. Perhaps you choose one or two where you can make an effort.

Social media marketing may be easy to understand, but it is not easy to achieve. It takes a lot of time, and a lot of effort. That's a fact.

What are your thoughts? Do you think social media marketing can be accomplished easily? Do you think a minimum works? I would love your thoughts in the comments.

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## The DVR Factor

Chances are good that if you have a cable service, you also have a DVR (digital video recorder). In fact, according to a Nielsen study, quoted in Mashable.com (here), the use of DVRs increased five-fold from 2006 to 2011. It seems that of all the devices connected to our TV, we use the DVR the most.



HD DVR photo by Apalapala on Flickr

Like the VCR of yore, the DVR lets you record a show for viewing at your convenience. Perhaps you are at work during the latest episode of Dr. Phil or you have to attend a family gathering during the Oscars. And unlike the VCR, DVRs use hard disk space, giving you hundreds of hours of recording time. A DVR would have been a tremendous help to me during the last episode of Felicity back in the 90s, which due to a VCR glitch, did not record and I never was able to watch it (but I digress).

Yesterday's New York Times has an article that says the networks are now blaming the DVR for weaker ratings (although weaker shows may be more to blame).

There is no doubt that DVRs are affecting how we view TV. One immediate effect for most people is that we no longer view the commercials thanks to the fast forward button. Does this mean that advertisers should re-evaluate whether to even have TV commercials in the advertising mix? Well, yes, they should. Clearly, relying on TV commercials, especially on shows that people tend to record (perhaps daytime shows or late night shows), is a risky proposition.

However, keep in mind that fast forward does not mean delete. You have to watch the screen while you are fast forwarding, so an intriguing commercial may actually catch your eye and make you hit play.

**The DVR Factor** is that forgettable or boring commercials will not attract attention anymore, and will even be ignored. On the other hand, interesting and creative commercials will stand out and perhaps even be more memorable and effective.

We are surrounded by advertising—much of which we can skip or ignore. But we still pay attention to advertising messages that resonate with us, whether because they are eye-catching or interesting.

What do you think? Do you watch ads at all?

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## Is it Happy Holidays or Merry Christmas?

Yesterday, a friend posted this on Facebook:



I could not disagree more. This seems to be part of a growing (and conservative) movement, which claims saying Happy Holidays is taking the Christmas out of Christmas. In my opinion, this is a completely intolerant and ignorant view and understanding of the reality of a multi-cultural and multi-

ethnic world. Christmas is celebrated by Christians, but not by Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Zen-Taoists and others.

Wishing happy holidays or season's greetings is a way of acknowledging the various holidays taking place at the end of the year: Christmas, New Year's, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa.

When you wish someone a Merry Christmas, you are saying you wish him or her a happy day of celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

One is inclusive, and one is exclusive. One assumes a belief and one doesn't.

As a communicator, you have to be careful not to make members of your audience feel excluded. Clearly, whether you wish Happy Holidays or Merry Christmas depends on who your target audience is. A church, for example, has a target audience of Christian worshipers and supporters. For a church to wish its audience Merry Christmas would be completely appropriate. For a non-religious institution (like the government or your business) to wish its audience Merry Christmas, would be exclusionary.

With business communications, there's the additional desire to steer clear of hot topics like religion and politics. Merry Christmas is a religious statement. Happy Holidays is not.

What do you think? Do you wish people Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas or something else?