

Quick! Check these potential problems right now

There are a few things that people tend to overlook or to simply not check.

Check the contact information CAREFULLY on your website/marketing materials

You want to make sure it is accurate. Perhaps have someone read it off to you. For example, in my newsletter I found the address had the wrong ZIP code. A graphic designer I know had one digit wrong in her phone number.

And check whether it can be found easily

I just spent a ridiculous amount of time trying to find where an art class was being offered—you know—the actual physical place where it was meeting. The website made you go to the About page where you had to scroll to the “where to find us” page. Why make it so complicated?



By PNASH, Flickr

Check to see if GPS/Google Maps/Mapquest can find your address

If you are any type of location that people drive to (store, restaurant, hotel, attraction), have you checked that the address you give out works on GPS/Google Maps/Mapquest? Sometimes street names have changed or are new and do not show

up.

Check how your email and enewsletters show up to recipients

Before you send out anything to the world, send yourself a sample. You want to make sure your name is spelled correctly, and how it shows up in the recipient's inbox. For example, someone I know was sending email that was coming from Email box 2 instead of her name. And just today I received an enewsletter titled "Sample Newsletter" from a well known institution. These can result in people not knowing who you are and ultimately, not opening your email/enewsletter.

Go check these things right now. Fix them if they don't check out. You will be glad you did.

Where do all the RSS feeds go

I have more than 100 subscriptions on my Google Reader. I love having the convenience of all those blogs in one place. Yesterday, I led my "How to write your blog" workshop, and the participants told me they don't use readers and doubt they have much traction. So, I thought I would survey to see if people use readers.

Please answer my poll. I will share the information with you in a blog post.

[polldaddy poll="6678494"]

Should you blog more often?

There's lots of advice floating around there about how often you should blog. Some say blog every day, some say twice a week. Does frequency matter? Should you blog more often or less often?

I advocate for blogging consistently rather than frequently. For some bloggers it may too much pressure to blog every day or even once a week. What can you accomplish consistently? Can you do once a month? In that case, that should be your blogging frequency.

A few weeks ago, I ran a poll via LinkedIn, asking the following question:

Do you judge a blog/blogger by the frequency of posting.

The answer options were:

- Yes
- No
- Depends on blog type
- I judge based on content rather than frequency.

Overwhelmingly, people said they judged based on content. Frequency may not matter that much.

The answer to should you blog more often is, quite simply, it depends.

In the end, you have to decide what is best for your target audience, and for your ability to blog. Does your target need

frequent updates? Are you able to deliver the frequency? If so, then blog more often. Are you using your blog to provide relevant information, that does not have to be updated so often? Then blog less often.

What do you think? What have you found works best for you, and why?

Has Pepco changed its communication strategy?

Last week, when we were waiting for Hurricane Sandy to hit, my main worry was losing power. Because the storm was predicted many days out, Pepco was actually ready, with out-of-state assets in place. Pepco also warned it could take a week or more to restore power (managing expectations?) Thankfully, Montgomery County was spared the worst of storm, and although some customers did lose power, the majority did not. Of course, New Jersey and New York were hit pretty badly and are still struggling to get power restored.

Detailed preparedness plan, communicated

Pepco seemed to go to great pains to communicate exactly how it was prepared to deal with the storm (participated in mutual aid calls, got repair crews in place, and so forth). Prior to the storm, every customer received a robocall warning to be prepared.

More faces of Pepco

I noticed that prior to the storm, Pepco held a couple of news

conferences. Instead of featuring Tom Graham, Pepco's regional president, who was everywhere during the Derecho coverage, Pepco featured David Velazquez, the executive vice president for power delivery for PHI (Pepco's parent company).

Here's the video:

Different tone and trying to do the right thing

In a full page color ad placed in yesterday's Sunday Washington Post, Pete Pedersen, Pepco's emergency preparedness manager is featured (again, not Tom Graham). The headline is "Thank you for weathering the storm with us." The body of the ad seems to recognize how much suffering being without power engenders saying:

Because so many other communities are suffering right now, we hope you will join us in making a contribution to the American Red Cross.

With any storm like this, we're all in it together.

The ad includes the American Red Cross logo and how to make a contribution. This shows some element of corporate social responsibility, which is in stark contrast to the lack of empathy exhibited during the Derecho, when Pepco even tried to charge customers a fee for the days they did not have power.

Gone is the defensiveness of the post-Derecho advertising. But this is Pepco after all, and there still is an element of back-patting:

But because of early preparations and your help in reporting outages and downed lines, we were able to respond quickly to this historic event.

Is this a new Pepco? I am cautiously optimistic.

Your thoughts?

Random thoughts to start November

Work for your treats!

Last night was Halloween, and I had a bowlful of good (chocolate) candy. There seemed fewer trick-or-treaters this year than last, and a lot fewer cute costumes. I am not sure what that was about. But what really bugged me was the teenager who showed up with her backpack open, wearing no costume, just ready to grab some candy. Really? She made no effort at all and perhaps she felt a sense of entitlement. I shut the door after that and decided to keep the rest of the candy for myself.

(Also, why is it that the littlest kids grabbed one piece of candy each, but the teenagers grabbed a handful?)

The takeaway here is that looking the part helps with buy-in. I am not inclined to give you candy if you don't look like a trick-or-treater, right?

How am I supposed to get home?

Last week I called a couple of dealerships about a malfunctioning knob in my car. Both dealerships were able to figure out approximately how much it would cost to fix but only one dealership offered a shuttle to take me home and pick

me up. Where do you think I made a service appointment?

When your car is in the shop, and it is going to take all day to fix, what are you supposed to do? You can't drive yourself, obviously, but you do have options: 1) you could sit at the dealership all day (and be bored and unproductive); 2) you could get a friend or family member to pick you up and take you back (if you have a favor that needs returning); 3) you could take a cab (could cost you lots of money); or 4) you could take public transportation to where you need to go (if it is even available).

The marketing lesson here is that offering a useful service like a courtesy shuttle will set you apart and bring you business, often more than advertising will.

Complain but with a purpose

Blogs are great for so many reasons, not the least of which is that it gives you a place to air your concerns. If you have a personal blog, complaining about something that happened to you at your local fast food shop or a blow up with a neighbor is appropriate. However, if you are writing for a small business or organizational blog, complaining just to blow off steam is not only useless, it may be detrimental. What is the reason that you are sharing the complaint? How is it helping your blog's readers? How is it getting your blog more readers of the kind you want?

For example, a couple of years ago, I wrote a complaint post about a certain cosmetics company. I did try to give it a communications spin, but the people that find my blog because of that particular post are other angry customers who are in no way interested in my thoughts on marketing communications, but rather in complaining about the cosmetics company. It gets me readers, but not readers in my target audience.

Before you start a complaint blog post or rant, think about how it fits with your blog's purpose and target audience.

Happy November!

Scary things communicators do

Yes, I know, it is somewhat formulaic to have a scary things post at Halloween, but why not? Following, in no particular order, are the scary (wrong) things communicators do:

- Not know their effect from their affect
- Declare that social media isn't necessary
- On the other hand, think that all they need to do is Tweet something out
- Think a USP is something like a USB
- Overlook the basics: not checking the address is correct, for example
- Network all the time or not at all
- Steer clear of professional development events because "there's nothing new to learn"
- Use corporate-speak phrases just to achieve buy-in or ramp up their core competency
- Fail to adapt to changing conditions ("We will send out the press release, I don't care that Hurricane Sandy just devastated New York.")

I know you have a few good ones to add—so please, please add them in the comments!

Have a happy Halloween! Hope you get more treats than tricks.



Pumpkins just in time for
Halloween

Communicating when disaster strikes

If you are anywhere on the Eastern Seaboard you are feeling the effects of Hurricane Sandy (or at least, you are hearing about the effects of Sandy on the nonstop news coverage). You are probably hunkered down at home since few people ventured out to work today. If your job is to communicate, you are faced with a tough situation: you cannot compete for attention! What should you do?

If you already have a **print campaign** running, there is nothing you can or should do. People realize that your ad or press release went out way before the storm.

If you have **TV ad campaign** running, realize that your spots probably won't run. Too much air space will be devoted to hurricane coverage. The issue you will have to face is whether you can continue to use those spots after the storm. Are they still relevant? More importantly, if people are dealing with after-disaster effects, how much impact will your ads have?

If you had scheduled a **press conference**, you should cancel it. Nobody wants to hear about product launches when they are worried about a tree crashing down on their house.

If you handle **communications for a business or organization**—especially a retail operation—you should update your website and social media feeds regarding your status (are you open or closed, do you have power or not, will you honor late payments etc.) You should also record a phone message for your location. Not everyone will have access to the Internet. You may also consider sending emails/SMS messages to customers who may need to reschedule appointments etc.

If you have a **press release** going out this week, you may want to reschedule it. Your news will have to compete with disaster information.

If you have a **social media campaign** running, first realize that many people may not have Internet access. You may want to postpone your campaign, and certainly, revisit and reconsider any scheduled Tweets, Facebook updates or blog posts. Mary Fletcher Jones of Fletcher Jones has written a very useful blog post: [6 Tips: How Communicators Can Prepare for Hurricane Sandy](#) where she deals with special considerations for social media.

What are you doing to communicate during and after the storm? Please share any insights here.

Do political ads work?

This year, we have been bombarded with political ads on TV, especially in swing states. I can attest to this since my TV DMA covers Northern Virginia, and Virginia is a swing state,

so we have been seeing (too) many here in Maryland.

The spending is in the billions. Adweek reports: Political TV Ads Shatter Records. It's not over yet. According to Adweek, as of last week, 915,000 presidential ads have appeared. Add to that congressional and senate ads, and ballot question ads, and I would be surprised if you have seen even one commercial for Viagra!

In today's Washington Post, Ned Martel writes in the article "Could the campaign ads benefit from Mad Men touch" that the ads are not even that good. He says:

To advertising executives, this onslaught of attack ads looks like a giant waste of money. It certainly runs counter to every risk-conscious maxim the industry has honed since the days of "Mad Men."

Negative ads have been a staple of political campaigns forever. You want to discredit your opponent, that is understood. Unfortunately, this year especially (or so it seems...memories are short), we are seeing that not only are these ads negative, they are also factually challenged. Glenn Kessler, "The Fact Checker" writer at the Washington Post, today rated one of Mitt Romney's ads regarding Obama's so-called Apology Tour four Pinnochios (which means that this particular ad includes falsehoods).

We are seeing a lot of back and forth: Romney says one thing, and Obama answers it. And to add legitimacy, we are seeing the use of news footage. An Obama ad recently used footage from a 60 Minutes interview of Mitt Romney.

But does any of it make any difference in trying to reach the mythical undecided voter? I am not sure. I think it must have some impact but does it change minds? Do people watch the ads or do they tune them out? I don't know. What are your thoughts?

All I learned about WordPress

I learned at camp

This blog is hosted on a website built on WordPress. Lots of blogs, and many websites, are built using WordPress because it is easy to use and easy to customize. Because WordPress makes it so easy to update your content, there are more organizations using WordPress as a content management system (CMS). If you use software such as Dreamweaver to build a website, you probably have to call your “web person” to ask him/her to make updates.

WordPress has built quite a large community of users and developers, many of whom have regular meet ups and discussion groups. A very popular (and fun) way to get a large group of WordPress enthusiasts together is WordPress “camp.” These camps happen year round in cities worldwide. All are volunteer run.

This past weekend I attended Word Camp Philadelphia, and last month I went to Word Camp in Baltimore. I am trying to learn all I can about WordPress since I don’t have an IT department or anybody handling my website (which is a long story).

I learned a lot at Word Camp Philadelphia (and kudos to the organizers who made this volunteer run event run smoothly and professionally). Here are some main takeaways:

Make security a priority

All websites are vulnerable to hacking. There are several steps you can take to minimize the risk. Among them:

- Do not use admin as your log on name

- Have a strong password
- Always update to the newest version of WordPress
- Be sure your plugins are compatible and updated

Backup often

We heard this time and time again—make your back ups happen automatically. There are many plugins (free and paid) that make this easy. The one mentioned by many presenters was BackupBuddy.

Plugins are cool

Plugins are little programs that add functionality to your WordPress site. There are thousands of plugins available for download from WordPress.org, providing the ability to share posts, create backups, and add lots of bells and whistles. You should keep plugins updated, and you should remove any you aren't using. Too many plugins can slow a website down, and create issues.

A few that were mentioned repeatedly were:

- All in One SEO pack
- AntispamBee
- Akismet
- Yet Another Related Post (YARPP) (running on this site)
- Digg Digg (for social sharing)

Content is crucial

If you don't have interesting and relevant content on your blog/website, why would anybody want to visit? Keep in mind that people don't like to read long chunks of text (as Jess Ostroff from Don't Panic Management put it: **TL;DR**, which stands for too long; didn't read). Also, to avoid long

uninterrupted text is why we break up content using headings, bullets and images. To organize your content, you should use some sort of content management system. Jess Ostroff recommended DivvyHQ.com (paid) or the WordPress Editorial Calendar (free).

Websites should be accessible

There is such a thing as making your website “handicapped accessible.” For example, blind people use web readers to visit websites. If you have images on your website, you should make sure to add alt text so that these readers can include a description of these images.

Another type of accessibility is for mobile devices. The newest version of the simple WordPress theme (Twenty Twelve) adjusts the dimensions of your website to make it fit to a mobile phone screen.

WordPress: it's not just for blogging anymore!

The most important takeaway is that WordPress is not just for blogging. Large organizations have already migrated their websites to a WordPress platform.

Go to camp already!

If you are interested in learning more about WordPress, I highly recommend going to Word Camp. However, not all camps are created equal and it may be worth it to travel to a camp that is well organized.

Are your events drawing fewer people?

Last week, I attended an event and the complaint from the organizers is that fewer and fewer people are attending. Now part of this particular group's situation has to do with poor publicity. In fact, their attendance has dwindled to such an extent that they have had to change venues. Today I attended another event (different group), same problem: fewer people.

If you are organizing an event that has been losing audience, you may want to ask yourself these questions:

Is your publicity reaching new/bigger audiences?

Obviously, if few people know you are having an event, few people will attend. As a communicator, you have to evaluate where you are publicizing your event, and whether you are attracting enough people. Moreover, if you are trying to expand the amount of people at your events, you are going to have to experiment with new ways of publicizing the event. If you can only count on your core group, you don't have a recipe for growth.

Is your program good?

There are just so many times I can go to a social media event. I have heard lots of it before. Nothing new there. **Programming content counts.** Doing a boring event or having the same speakers is not going to draw a new or bigger crowd.

What else is going on that day?

This is about the importance of timing. If you are having an event, and there is a presidential debate going on that evening, you are forcing people to choose, and you may lose. Also, what time of day is your event? Have you experimented with other times?

How good was your last event?

You know the saying, *you are only as good as your last success*. How successful was your last event? Were people interested, motivated, energized? Or did you receive complaints? Was the speaker entertaining or boring? Unfortunately, you do not have too much control over circumstances (speaker was grumpy, people were late due to mass transit problems, etc.), but it matters anyhow. If you had a crappy event, people aren't going to want to attend another event that you put on.

Do you know who your audience is? Do you know why they attend your events?

You don't survey you attendees? Big mistake! If you don't even know why the people who are there attended, how are you going to figure out why people aren't attending? YOU MUST SURVEY...even informally. As an organizer, ask people on the way in how they found out about the event and on their way out whether they enjoyed the event. Have forms people can fill out. Send out an electronic survey. Do what it takes to find out more about your audience.

What are you up against and how are you fixing it? Let me know in the comments.