Stupid on repeat=marketing fail

Repeat phone calls from different numbers, same message

Around 11 a.m. my cell phone rings and the caller ID shows an 1-800 number. I don't answer. Seconds later there's a voicemail message. It is a recording of a robotic woman warning of some account suspension. I delete the message without listening to all of it. About five or ten minutes later, another call from another 1-800 number. Again, I don't answer. And again, there's the exact same voicemail message. This has happened for the past three days. That's six calls from six different 1-800 numbers and six identical robotic voicemail messages.

Perhaps the spammer's "strategy" is this:

- Use an 1-800 number since it looks official
- Use different 1-800 numbers for each call, so target won't figure out it's the same entity calling
- Scare the target with an official sounding message about "immediate account suspension" to create fear/anxiety. This fear will lead to target answering the phone five minutes after the original message and/or calling back.
- Call at the same time every day because this will make a target answer or pick up

Stupid "marketing"

What's behind this "marketing" strategy is the assumption that the target won't see that the 1-800 calls are not official, and that they will pick up. In other words, the "strategy" is based on the idea that the target is too stupid to see that this is a scam.

Sending the same email, over and over and over and over…

There's a guy named Steve Marriot who really wants to speak to me about my credit. He wants it so much that he sends me the same email day after day. His subject line says "Let's grow together in 2019." He just wants to set up me to call him to discuss my credit needs. Or better yet, just apply since his company has analyzed my company and determined I am eligible for a quarter million dollar loan at a low rate! Okay then. Oh, and there is absolutely no information about Steve's "company" in the email. No website address, no description, no nothing but there is a link for an application. As if I am going to click that.

Putting the stupid in marketing

First, sending the same email multiple times does not make me want to open a line of credit with you. Credit and finance are trust-based transactions. I don't know Steve, but I do know he is running a con. He knows nothing about my company or me and nobody but nobody pre-approves you for a loan without knowing anything about your finances. Second, are you really that stupid to think that I am so stupid as to respond to an email from an unknown "financial" company?

Do you assume your customers are stupid? If you do, please stop. The only marketers that bet on stupidity are spammers. And that is the bottom line.

Be a more effective writer:

Think BLUF

What is BLUF?

I only recently learned about BLUF, which stands for "bottom line up front," from a woman who works in project management at a computer/software company. In her line of work, she says, she has little time to wade through a morass of details, and needs to know the bottom line first (i.e., what is the project is going to cost).

TL, DR

It's not much different in any type of writing. I am sure you've seen people post articles with the disclaimer "TL, DR," which stands for "too long, didn't read." People don't have time to read long, detailed articles or emails, *especially if they are reading them on a mobile device*. People want to know what it's about, and then read it slowly when they have time. This is why subject lines and headlines are so crucial—that's your BLUF for emails and articles. Say what it's about.

Don't bury the lede!

With news releases, it is imperative that the first paragraph carry the important information. The rest of the release is filled with the details and quotes. The same holds for news articles. In journalism, when you don't provide the crucial information up front, it's called "burying the lede."

Take this article from Eater DC: "HipCityVeg Brings its Vegan Versions of Fast Food Favorites to Dupont Circle." It's about the opening of the restaurant's second location in Washington, DC, and yet, I have to read through **NINE** paragraphs about how and why HipCityVeg does what it does before I find out the exact address of the new location. The address should have been in the first paragraph, so that somebody who want to actually visit the restaurant, knows where to find it.

What does the reader *need* to know?

When writing a marketing piece, a blog post, an email, do yourself a favor and think BLUF: What is the most important thing your reader has to know? Being bottom line-oriented and putting the important stuff up front, will make you a better, more effective writer.

What's in it for me?

It's Copywriting 101

If you ever looked at any basic copywriting advice, you'd probably have seen the bit where they tell you to talk about the benefits of whatever it is you are writing about. Benefits is what is in it for the audience. Perhaps they get a good price, or look younger, or help save the world. You are always supposed to highlight what the audience gets from the good or service or organization you are promoting. It's Copywriting 101.

But spammers don't take copywriting classes

The other day I got a spam email (meaning it was from someone I don't know, who probably harvested my name from the internet, and is trying to sell me something). I got the same email again yesterday. Here's what the email said:

Hi Deborah,

I just came across your blog madmimi.com and wanted to reach out to you. I am reaching out because I was wondering if you would post a 500 word article that contains 2-3 links that would be relevant to the article topic. The article would also need to be written .

Please advise on the cost for this service and if you offer a bulk pricing package.

Have an awesome Thursday,

Thanks,

[name withheld]

So many questions

Okay. Let's start with the blindingly obvious problem. I don't have a blog called madmimi.com (I do, however, used Mad Mimi for my sadly neglected newsletter).

Let's go on to the next part of the email: I'm being asked to post an article, presumably on my blog, about a non-disclosed topic, and include two or three links, but to where exactly? The article "would have to be written," presumably by me. Then the writer wants to know the cost for this service.

But really there is nothing in it for me

I'm supposed to conclude, only guessing here, that this email's writer is willing to pay me to write an article about whatever I want to post on my own blog. But of course, that makes no sense. The email writer must have a subject in mind. And really, why would I post an article about any random subject on my blog, and charge someone for it if there is nothing in it for them, and it is not clear what is in it for me? I already have an established blog (you are reading it right now), where I have been posting articles written by me for the past 10+ years.

It seems that what the email writer is really trying to do, quite in-artfully, is to get me to respond asking for more information or perhaps check out the website associated with the writer's email address. That's why this is spam.

Answer "what's it in it for me?"

If you want anything you write to succeed, start with how your audience benefits. What will they get from it? Imagine if this spammer would have said exactly what he/she meant (i.e., we'll pay you to promote our product/service on your blog), I may have been more interested. Instead, I wrote a blog post about how bad these spammers are at selling. Perhaps it was a win after all.

Not just what you say, but how you say it

Recently, I came across this article on ThriveGlobal: "3 Communication Mistakes that Lead to a Toxic-feeling Workplace." The article addresses interpersonal communications, but I think the first mistake, not paying attention to how your message is being received, applies to all communications. This is what the article says:

Not being mindful of how your words land

A large portion of what we say stems from how we read the present situation, and our sense of self-awareness plays a vital role in our everyday conversations. According to a recent study conducted by a group of psychologists at the University of California, Davis, many people don't realize they're being rude when they're perceived as such, suggesting blind spots in our self-insight that can prompt miscommunications at work. The study's findings highlight the importance of listening to yourself when you're talking to others. If you hear what you're saying and think you might be offended if someone said the same to you, it's worth

Because it's not just what you say, but how you say it.

I am sure we all have experienced people saying things to us in an awkward or rude way that made us feel not so great. We may have gotten angry or offended. And I think that what these people say is not the problem so much as how they say it. Yes, it comes down to how you present something.

This applies to all communication

When writing marketing materials, you are concerned with the words you choose, the messages you deliver. But you should also be concerned with tone and presentation. How is your message coming across? What kind of emotions are you engendering?

How is your messaging "landing?"

If you want your message to resonate with your audience, you must assess how you are coming across, and be careful in how you are saying what you are communicating.

4 items to consider before you write your next marketing piece:

1) Humor needs context and sometimes, tone of voice: Avoid inside jokes or weird humor unless you know the audience will absolutely get it. Remember that humor is hard to express in a written format.

2) Mind your sarcasm: Ask yourself if you are being flippant or sarcastic, and remember that tone of voice is not easily conveyed in written materials. Also, some people don't understand sarcasm, and may take it literally.

3) Mind your manners: I heard somewhere that having manners is

about putting others at ease. When you follow conventions, people know what to expect. So ask yourself if your communication is being rude or abrupt.

4) Be empathetic: Ask yourself if how and what you are saying could be causing negative emotions (anger, frustration, embarrassment) in your audience. For example, perhaps you are trying to berate your audience for missing a deadline. Most likely, berating your audience will cause embarrassment or even anger.

Thinking carefully about how you say and present your message will lead to better communications.

How to make your communications more effective

Merriam-Webster defines effective as "producing a decided, decisive or desired effect." Effective communication, therefore, leads its target audience to a planned or desired outcome. Conversely, ineffective communications do not produce the desired effect, they don't hit the target.

How do you make sure your communications efforts hit the target?

Not with signs that point the wrong way

This morning I attended a business networking event at a local hotel. I haven't attended any events in this location before, and I have only been in the hotel's lobby once before. I walked in, and asked at the check-in desk where the event was being held. I was told to go around the corner to the elevators and down to G2. When I turned around, *behind* me, was a sign for the event. The sign was facing the check-in desk, not the main entrance, so it would not be seen at all by someone entering the hotel.

This sign was ineffective because it did not address the needs of people entering the lobby from the main entrance. Had the event organizers considered that some people would be entering the hotel through the main entrance, they would have known where to place the sign.

Not with a mismatched presentation and audience

Last week, I attended an event entitled "Communication and Marketing Strategies that Will Grow Your Business." It was held under the auspices of a networking group, in a business accelerator space. Most of the audience members were very small businesses, freelancers or solopreneurs (companies of one). The presenters were from a large, multinational communications firm that services large clients. They decided to give a presentation on how to develop a marketing plan (a four-step process according to them).

It was clear that the presentation was completely mismatched to the audience when the presenters got to the part about generating different tactics. Among the tactics they advised was holding a press conference. In my career in public relations, I saw my clients hold press conferences very rarely. The fact is that press conferences need to be about big news to get any kind of coverage, especially in this age where media attention is so fractured. A small accounting firm owner or a career coach, two people who were in the audience that day, would never hold a press conference.

This presentation was not as advertised, that is, to share marketing strategies to grow your small business. It was geared toward large enterprises rather than the small businesses that were in the audience. The presenters either did not know who they were addressing or were not thinking if the information they were sharing was appropriate to the needs of the audience. In short, the presentation was ineffective.

Effective communication only happens when you consider the audience

Effective communicators consider the needs of the target audience. Without considering what those recipients need to know, or how they need to know it, the communications will fail, or miss its target.

Bottom line:

You will hit the target more often if you consider what your audience needs.

The amateur effect

It seems to me that there are fewer experienced professionals working in day-to-day marketing. Instead, we're seeing more and more amateurs, or inexperienced people, "managing" or running things, especially digital marketing efforts. There are consequences to a lack of experience: amateur mistakes.

The amateur effect can be seen in the explosion of typos, missing information, missing links, poorly designed websites, hard-to-understand copy, and a myriad other maladies that makes your marketing look unprofessional at best, and be ineffective at worst.

Did anyone double-check this?

This is part of full-page ad in the *Washington Business Journal*:

This summer, don't lift a fi nger – just a glass.

Total Wine & More can help make your event planning easy and right on budget. Let us help you ramp up your company picnic and summer gatherings among other events throughout the year like grand openings, product launches, ann meetings and more. Our team is here to assist with expert recommendation w to stock your bar and find delicious pairings from our selection of 8,00 00 spirits*, and 2,500 beers. And toast to the easiest event you've plan

Can you spot the issue? It's the extra space in the word finger. How could this happen? Probably because nobody proofread the laid-out copy.

And then there are typos

There are typos galore in newspapers, books, and magazines. This is partially due to cut-backs in editorial staff, but it is also due to having amateurs in charge.

And misused words

Affect and effect do not mean the same thing. Enough said.

And missing information, and missing links

A few weeks ago I got a promotional email from a day spa promoting the spa's outdoor pool opening for the summer. There was a link to click for more information. The link didn't

work. I went to the website because I wanted to find out if you could get a day pass for the pool, and if so, how much it would cost. Well, there was no information about the pool. None. The website was a mess, and if the information was there, it was buried so deep you'd need to hire an archaeologist to find it.

Why all the problems?

Amateurs don't believe in double-checking stuff, because they don't know what they are checking for.

Amateurs don't ask questions, because they don't know what questions to ask or to whom.

The bottom line is that amateurs don't know what they don't know, and they don't know enough to ask.

The solution is experience

There is no substitute for experience. If you don't want your marketing to be rife with mistakes, and just be plain ineffective, you need to hire experienced people to run your programs, and to mentor the less experienced staff. People can learn to be great marketers, but they need guidance.

What do you think? Have you seen or experienced the amateur effect?

You can have too much of a good thing

A visit to a good Indian restaurant goes bad

Last week, a friend and I headed out to a very good, local Indian restaurant to satisfy a craving for some naan and sag paneer. When we arrived, there were barely a couple of other people in the place, and so the hostess told us we had our choice of seats. After we sat down, a male server came by to take our order.

After the meal was served, a female server came by to see whether everything was satisfactory.

And then a different female server came by to see if "everything was OK."

And then the male server came by to ask how everything was.

And then one of the female servers came by again to see how things were.

And then the other female server came by.

And before we were even done with the meal, one of the female servers asked if we needed a box for our food.

I lost count, but we were asked if everything was OK at least six or seven times by different servers and in fairly short intervals.

After all these unnecessary interruptions, my friend and I were annoyed, and left wondering if they needed the table (although a good half the restaurant was empty).

Photo by Chan Walrus from Pexels

Checking in is good…but doing it too often is not

After ordering, we should all expect two contacts in a restaurant: one to get asked if everything is to our liking, and a second one, closer to the end of the meal, to ask whether we want to have food boxed up, want to order dessert, or need our check.

But this restaurant took follow up and checking in to a level that was beyond annoying. They interrupted us too many times, seemingly without cause. Was it that the servers didn't communicate with each other? Were they bored because they didn't have enough customers? Who knows what motivated these servers, but all that checking in was way too much of a good thing, turning it into a bad thing.

Too much contact or follow up is disruptive, intrusive, annoying, and unnecessary.

What is true about overzealous restaurant servers is the same with email marketing. As I said in my last blog post, your email marketing should aim to be "just right." Just right

means sending not too much, nor too little email, and sending relevant, useful information too. In the Indian restaurant experience above, not only were these serves constantly interrupting, they weren't doing it with any real purpose.

So the next time you want to send one more email to "make sure people got the message," think about your last restaurant meal. Was it enjoyable and peaceful? Or were you annoyed because the servers kept asking you if everything was OK or you wanted another drink before you even finished the one you had in front of you.

Think like Goldilocks to improve your email marketing

I was on vacation for a couple of weeks, and during that time, I didn't hear from one of my friends at all. She didn't want to know if I'd arrived safely, what I was doing, or anything else. On the other hand, another acquaintance texted me several times, wanting to know how my flight was, what I was doing, was I having any fun, and so forth. And yet another friend sent me just two messages, both because she saw something that related to me and wanted to let me know.

In other words, I got too little from one friend, too much from another, and just the right amount from the third. I felt like I finally understood how Goldilocks felt when she broke in to the bears' house.

The Goldilocks Approach to Email Marketing Defined

All email marketers should apply a Goldilocks test to their email marketing, and figure out what make the "just right" email campaign. The Goldilocks test involves awareness of three issues: timing, quantity and content relevance. To be like Goldilocks, ask yourself whether you email marketing is too cold, too hot, or just right.

Too cold!

When the porridge goes cold, you don't want to eat it.

You email marketing is too cold when you don't send any/enough email to your contact list, or you send irrelevant email that gets ignored/deleted. In this case, you risk being forgotten, or you are making your contacts think you are not in business any more, or worse, that you don't offer anything that is of value to them.

Too hot!

On the other hand, if the porridge is too hot, you can't eat it because don't want to touch it and risk being burned.

Your email marketing is too hot when you send too much email. You are overwhelming your contacts and risk alienating them. If you send too much email, your contacts don't know what is valuable. Also, too much email is annoying. Statistics back this up. More than a quarter of people who unsubscribe from email lists do so because they say they get too many emails. Read more here.

Just right!

When the porridge is at the ideal temperature, you can eat and even enjoy it.

The "just right" email campaign is when you send timely email that is valuable to your contacts. If you send well-timed, relevant email, you are doing your list a service. Your contacts will benefit from your email. A well thought out email campaign will have a better open rate, less churn, and may result in action on the part of your contacts (a sale, donation, download, etc.).

What makes an email marketing campaign just right for you? Please let me know in the comments.

Your website is your business' front door

We use Google today just like we used the phone book years ago. In fact, anybody born from the late 1990s on only knows to use Google when looking up stuff (not that we even have phone books anymore).

Search on Google and you find websites!

Google pulls up two sources of information in response to your query—websites and different Google products, including Google My Business listings, and Google Maps. In other words, if you want your business to be found on Google, you need one or both of these (and you can't have a good Google My Business listing without a website).

It follows that if you want your business to succeed, you will have a findable, **updated**, easy-to-navigate website. If you want to really have success, you will also claim your Google My Business listing, and keep it **up to date.**

The information that absolutely must be current

It's absolutely essential that you keep your website and Google My Business listing current and up to date. If not, you might as well hope people still have that phone book handy so they can find your number.

There's no big mystery about what you need to keep tabs on: anything that impacts your customer's interaction with your business, including:

- Hours
- Location
- Contact information
- Team members/staff/leadership
- Services/products
- Pricing

If any of the above change, you must update your website. It really is that simple. If not, you risk alienating your

customers.

Not keeping up with your website is….not good

Just in the past couple of months, I've had two instances where websites were not updated with important information. When I looked up the massage therapist that I'd gone to a couple of years ago, her website appeared the same, as did her pricing. I went ahead and made an appointment, and it was only after I was ready to pay that I learned that her pricing had gone up by 10%. Yesterday, I looked up my hair salon's website to find the number to make an appointment. The website says that the salon is open seven days a week, but when I called yesterday (Monday), I got a recording informing me that the salon is closed on Mondays. Both of these experiences were annoying, but also avoidable had the business owners taken the time to update their websites.

Bottom line:

Keeping your website updated is a best practice for business. Not doing it can alienate customers.

It's not all about you, nor should it be

As I was driving in today's heavy rain, I noticed whether cars had headlights on. Most did, but there were several that didn't. What reasoning would possess anyone to not turn on their headlights in the pouring rain (and I think it may actually be a driving rule here in Maryland)? Sure, some people forget. But when you look around and everyone else has theirs on, does that not remind you to do it too? I mentioned

this to a friend, and she said she believes it's because the drivers think they only need lights on when they themselves can't see. They fail to think about the fact that the lights help others to see them.

The marketing communications angle here is that whenever you produce any marketing materials, you can't just think about yourself (your company or organization) but about the people who will be using/reading/accessing those materials. When you fail to think about what they need, like the cars without headlights in the pouring rain, you are making it harder for them to see you.

Events happening sometime during St. Patrick's weekend

Take for example the Facebook event posting from a local Irish pub for its St. Patrick's Day celebration. It listed the following information, verbatim:

Saturday and Sunday Outdoor Festival. Live Music, Pipes & Drums, Irish Dancers, Bouncy Castle Face Painting and so much more!

Do you notice anything missing (other than the comma between castle and face painting)? How about times? Is it all day? When and where is the live music? What bands will be performing? Where does this all take place? In the pub? On the street outside the pub? Is this free? Or is there a fee?

Since I was interested in attending (come on, they had a bouncy castle!), I had to message the pub and ask. They responded telling me they were opening early for brunch at 10 a.m., and that the outdoor activities would also start then, and the live music would go on at 2 p.m. I thanked them and suggested they include that information in their event page, you know, to make it clearer for anyone interested in possibly attending.

The devil really is in the details

Having seen many marketing pieces, whether it be websites,

brochures or press releases, with a similar lack of salient detail, I know it is common to forget that your audience does not know everything you do about whatever you are promoting. There are the restaurant websites that fail to list their location or their operating hours. Or the product sales sheet that doesn't list the size of the product or its cost. And on and on.

In order to produce effective, useful marketing materials, you *must* consider your audience. What details does the audience need to know? What information is relevant and is it included in your marketing piece?

It's all about the Ws

A way to gauge whether you are including the information your audience needs is to follow the journalist's guideline of asking the "5 Ws + H": who, what, where, when, why, and how. If your marketing piece answers those questions, you will have provided the most relevant information. For events, the what, where, and when are crucial. Clearly, the pub's marketing folks do not have a journalistic or events planning background. I will chalk up their poorly thought out event invitation to it being produced by an amateur. One would hope no professional marketing person would fail to include the when and where information on an event listing.

Don't be so centered on your own needs that you forget what your audience needs to know. In other words:

Turn on your headlights so others can see you.