Who should handle your Twitter feed?

Twitter (and any other social network) is a form of public communication. Even individuals who are representing themselves are using it as a platform to reach a broader audience. Throw in a few hashtags and re-Tweets and suddenly you may be talking to millions of people.

At an organizational level, who should handle your Twitter feed? For many organizations, it falls to the communications/marketing folks (fine) and for some it is interns (not so fine). Some organizations have their top executive tweet (really good, I think).

And then there is Sweden, yes the country of Sweden (or rather its tourism board). You see, Sweden has embarked on an experiment to allow citizens to handle the @sweden Twitter feed. There are some rules on the ground—apparently, citizens should not discuss political views.

Someone forgot to tell the latest citizen to handle @sweden, a 27-year old "holy mother of two" Sonja Abrahamsson, that racism should also not be displayed. Sonja apparently is a huge fan of Adolf Hitler, and seems to be just a tad anti-Semitic. You can read all about it in this story on The Atlantic Wire and this story on AdWeek.

How is having Sonja do some stupid (racist) jokes helping to communicate anything positive about Sweden to any readers of the Twitter feed?

The person in charge of your Twitter feed is representing you (your organization, business or country) to the world. He or she is in effect, your public spokesperson. As such, this person should have the following characteristics:

- Be very knowledgeable about your organization (or country)
- Understand how Twitter works and that it can be quoted and used as a news source
- Be familiar with all key messages, press releases and other public information
- Be prepared to answer questions and comments professionally and not emotionally
- Be enthusiastic about your organization (or country)
- Keep personal opinions to him/herself

What do you think? Who handles your Twitter feed? Would you ever let someone like Sonja take over your feed? Thoughts and comments welcome!

Did that commercial just go boom?

Have you ever noticed how certain words or phrases seem to become ubiquitous? Sometimes it is because of a movie ("dude" became very very popular after Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure). Sometimes it is because of a TV show. Sometimes, I am just not sure.

I heard a commercial on the radio the other day for a cell phone company, where one of the guys was saying "Boom!" and the other other guy replies: "Stop saying that!" And the other guy goes on "Boom, and there it was." I can't remember the words verbatim, but it was all about boom.

And then I started to see/hear boom everywhere, including this

commercial for Miracle-Gro Potting Soil:

Notice the last word in the commercial.

Boom!

I bet you start noticing boom all over the place. If you find
a good one, share it here in the comments.

Root your messages in reality not ideology

Every organization (business, nonprofit, political,
association) should have a list of key messages.These key
messages should be updated frequently (no less than once a
year). If yours doesn't, it's time to start creating a list of
key messages. Key messages form the basis of your speeches,
press releases and other communications materials.

Key messages should include facts about the organization, the
organization's mission and philosophy, organizational goals,
how the organization operates and other important information
you want your audience to know.

Your key messages should be genuine, and stand up to
scrutiny. Some organizations end up with key messages that
are not reflective of reality, but rather are ideological.
This is especially true with political organizations.

I came across a great example key messages that don't
accurately reflect reality in yesterday's Washington Post. In
a story written by Dan Eggen on page A7, entitled "McDonnell
says stimulus aided Va. —but only in the short run," the first

paragraph says:

> *Virgina Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) wandered off script somewhat Sunday as a surrogate for the Mitt Romney presidential campaign, conceding that President Obama's stimulus measures had helped his state weather the economic crisis.*

Of course, the Romney campaign has been arguing that Obama's stimulus hurt the economy, and did not create jobs—*because stimulus goes against Republican economic ideology.* Governor McDonnell was reflecting the reality on the ground in his remarks—that indeed the stimulus has helped Virginia. He "went off message" because instead of being ideological, he was being factual, rooting his comments in the reality of his state.

A similar situation occurred last week when Cory Booker said that he was sickened by the attacks on Bain Capital. The Obama campaign's key messages about Romney's tenure at Bain were more ideological than factual. Booker was simply reflecting facts that private equity firms are not the way they were being portrayed by the campaign. Booker was roundly criticized for "going off message."

When key messages IGNORE reality and facts, and simply reflect ideology and beliefs, they are open to attack and leave spokespeople with the opportunity of "wandering off script" or "going off message."

Most people have a hard time lying when asked a direct question. If your key messages are ideologically but not factually correct, they will not stand up to scrutiny. You don't want to ask spokespeople to lie, so inject some honesty into your messaging!

How much information are you requiring?

Yesterday on Twitter, someone posted about an event that sounded intriguing. I went to check out the link provided for details, thinking I would find time, place and cost, but instead I found a sign-up form. The form asked for: name, gender, date of birth, time zone, location, religious views, email and a password. I kid you not. Or, you could sign up using your Facebook login.

How much of this information are you requiring? **The information you require can be construed as a barrier to entry**. You put up figurative barriers, at differing "heights" to reduce the amount of people that can access your offering.

Now, some people have absolutely no problem handing over any information that is asked of them. I used to know a woman who would even give out her social security number and her mother's maiden name just to be on an email list. And then there are people like me, who guard their personal information zealously and will only give up the minimum for a good reason. For example, if the doctor's office wants to know if I have had a surgery or take any medication. But why would I give an organization putting together an EVENT my birth date and religious affiliation?

This problem extends to the growing number of websites that require you to sign up with your Facebook account. Again, some people consider their Facebook profile public. And some—like me—don't. Facebook has already compiled a good amount of personal information about you: where you live, where you are from, who your friends are, what your likes and dislikes are,

your age and if you provided them with this info: where you went to school, your religion, your marital status and on and on.

You should consider exactly what information you require, and furthermore, you should tell people what you plan to do with that information. What exactly are you going to do to safeguard the privacy of that information?

Again, some people are pretty lax about privacy. But there is a continuum, and if your goal is to get more people (not fewer) to sign up, then you will have to consider that some people are not so comfortable handing over this information.

What are your thoughts? On a personal level, do you give any information requested, or do you fudge it? Do you sign in using your Facebook?

On an organizational level, how much information are you requiring and is all of it necessary?

Check your content much?

When was the last time you checked—and I mean thoroughly checked—your online content? Recently? Last quarter? Last year? When you launched the website?

If you haven't done it recently (within the past six months), I suggest hopping over to your website RIGHT NOW.

It's crucial to check for accuracy and relevance of your content. Here are a few areas you most definitely want to check and update if necessary:

- Contact information

- Product/service listing
- Pricing
- About page (everybody still with your company or in the same position?)
- Home page (what exactly is the first thing you are telling people about your company?)

People are using the web more and more each day to find vendors and buy stuff. An out-of-date or inaccurate website will make it difficult for those potential customers to do business with you.

What are you waiting for! Go do it now.

Should you do all your marketing on social media?

Social media has lots of pluses when it comes to marketing. Among them are:

- Low cost (especially compared to the cost of advertising on television)
- Word-of-mouth value for trust and amplification
- Speed and ease in execution

Social media is a VALUABLE part of a marketing communications plan, but, it should not be the only part. If you put ALL your effort/dollars into social media, there is little doubt that you will be failing to reach all of your target audience.

Let me tell you about two companies that make their business solely on online traffic, but are advertising in other media:

Constant Contact and Reputation.com

In case you have never received an enewsletter, you should know that Constant Contact is an established email marketing business. Many organizations and businesses use Constant Contact to send out email campaigns. Constant Contact advertises its services on the radio. Yes. On the radio.

Reputation.com works on making sure that you preserve a good reputation online. It is useful for people/organizations that have received negative reviews or are associated with with negative news/information. Reputation.com advertises in print (I saw a print ad this morning in the Washington Post). It also advertises on television.

If these two companies—which do business online—have to take their advertising off line, that should tell you that you cannot rely on social media (or online media) alone. You have to mix it up. You have to reach potential customers where they are, and they may not be on social or online.

Do you do all your marketing on social media? If so, tell me why. If not, also tell me why.

Marketing lessons from an A+ plumber

As a homeowner, I have dealt with dozens of contractors to perform repairs and inspections, and all the other things one needs to get done in a house. One stands out—my plumber Mark.

Not only is he a good plumber, he's a nice guy. I think we can learn a whole lot about marketing from him.

Choose your target market carefully: Mark has decided exactly where he is most comfortable working, geographically and culturally. He knows also what he is NOT looking for.

Advertise to the target market only: Mark does not have a sign on his truck, and he does not run ads in the mass media. He wants to continue working with his target market and not with just anyone.

Distinguish yourself from the competition: In Mark's case, he is green (although not certified) and he prides himself on punctuality. These are two things he highlights in his marketing materials.

Love what you do and be good at it: Mark loves plumbing and has since he was a child. He also knows what he is doing.

Be professional and responsive: Mark responds to inquiries quickly. He asks for pictures of the repair that needs to get done so he can properly assess and estimate the job.

Be pleasant and respectful: People like to do business with people they like. Mark always shakes hands with you when he comes to your house, and he immediately dons booties to prevent tracking dirt into your house. (something most contractors don't even think about). Mark also leaves his work area spotless. No messes to clean up.

In the end, Mark wins at marketing because he has figured out how to market to a niche audience, to provide exemplary service that generates return business and referrals and he doesn't waste his marketing dollar reaching out to people outside his market.

Me, We and You

At the women's conference I referenced on Monday's post, the organizer was also the emcee. She introduced the keynote speaker like this:

I met [speaker] at a conference, and I think she's so great. I learned a lot from her. I was really impacted by what she said. I learned that….

This is not a verbatim quote but do you notice anything about this "introduction?" It is all about the organizer and not about who she is introducing. It's a "me" speech. Not a "we" speech and certainly not a "you" speech.

I asked Brad Phillips (@mrmediatraining on Twitter), president of Phillips Media Relations, a media training organization, what he thought of a speech that focused on "I." His response was:

  Depends on the humility of the speaker, I suppose. Can range from humble self-experience to (more often) grating and ego-filled.

In other words, an "I speech" can seem self-aggrandizing and can potentially turn the audience off, especially if the speaker shows no humility.

It seems to me that emcees at an event should focus more on the we and you than on the me. The event after all, is not about the emcee, it is about the collective audience. It is not about the emcee's ego.

In this case, I think this particular emcee was very self-focused. She was neither humble nor overly egotistical but seemingly clueless as to how she was coming across. She did

not seem to care that she should have given the speaker a proper introduction (Ms. so and so is a writer focused on x, and she has been working in this field since x, etc.) and she also did not seem to be able to connect the dots on how this particular speaker would help us, the audience, why this speaker had been invited to speak.

In marketing communication, the focus should be on the you or the we, and not the me. If you ever go to a website or read a brochure that goes on about me, me, me and does not address how we work together or how this benefits you, you know you are dealing with someone who has not a single clue about audience (or its needs).

Invest in event planning not just event marketing

Many organizations, especially nonprofits and associations, focus on having one annual event that is meant to be a fundraiser or a idea-raiser. Events are a great way to publicize an organization, get people together, and provide value to attendees. Except when the events don't go well. And that is a big exception.

Unfortunately, many events have better publicity than planning, and that is guaranteed to backfire. What I mean is that event organizers spend inordinate amounts of time and money to make sure that people know and attend a conference, and spend much less time and money on the logistics of the

event.

This past Saturday, I attended a "women's conference." It had a very nice website, and was going to deal with some intriguing subject matter (women and politics, women in developing countries, etc.) I believed the hype and bought my ticket (also, I had a very nice discount from a friend involved with the group).

First indication of a problem was the disparity of information between the ticket and the website. One said the program started at 8:30, the other that registration started then, and the program at 9:45. Neither was right.

Lesson: Make sure the details are correct, and that everyone has the same information.

The people who were involved with greeting and registering were doing neither when I arrived at 8:50. Badges were still being put out. No one handed me a program. It was disorganized.

The program did not start until 10:15. From there, everything ran late. No one thought to tell people where the breakout sessions would be, and one was on a different floor (the session I was signed up for).

Lesson: Timing matters.

The "panelists" for the session I attended were sitting and chatting amongst themselves for 25 minutes, ignoring the fact that 40 people were sitting and waiting for them to start.

Lesson: Explain expectations to presenters.

And then there was the issue of lunch. It was supposed to be "grab and go." I am vegetarian and guess what, there was not a single vegetarian option to be found.

Lesson: If you are going to offer food (and there is no other

food available on site) then you have to consider dietary restrictions.

The bottom line is that the event organizers did not pay attention to the organization aspect of running an event. While I am sure that some people got some value from this particular event, these lapses in logistics wasted my time (and my money).

Event planners pay attention to every last detail from food choice and availability to coat checks to bathroom locations. Event marketers, on the other hand, are focused on getting registrations. Both are EQUALLY important. **If you sacrifice planning for publicity, you will have a disorganized event. If you sacrifice publicity for planning, you will have a poorly attended event.** Either scenario will create PR headaches for you later on.

In my case, I will probably never attend this particular women's conference again. My perception of the event and its organizers is that they were more focused on the bottom line than on making sure everything went smoothly for the attendees.

If you are organizing an event, be sure you spend as much time planning it as you do publicizing it. And PS, event planning is a skill. Get qualified/experienced people to help plan your event. It does pay off.

Who is your audience?

Perhaps the most basic question you have to ask yourself before creating any marketing/communications materials is:

Who is my target audience?

The more you know who they are, where they are and what they need, the better your materials will be.

And yet. A couple of days ago, I was driving down Massachusetts Avenue in Northwest D.C. and saw a sign outside of a church that made me wonder.

The sign said:

English Classes Available. Please Call [telephone number] to Enroll.

Now, if you need to learn English, can you read English? Nope. Is the audience for this sign people who know people who need to learn English? Perhaps. I would think this sign would be more effective if it were written in the language of the people you are trying to target, don't you think?